

RISKY BEESWAX: ARTISTIC RESPONSES TO THE BIOPOLITICS OF HIV/AIDS

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Abstract

In my dissertation, I examine risk in relation to HIV/AIDS and queer art and sex; and the problem that industrial mitigations of risk pose to sexually active queer men living with HIV, the kinds of sex they want, and the people they fuck in the era of AIDS industry. I explore this problem through four themes that emerged during my interviews with artists whose practices respond to AIDS and/or queer sex: 1) risking the personal; 2) (radical, ludic, and risky) sexual ecologies; 3) AIDS, its intersections and risky representations; and 4) the role of risk in art and artistic practice. I also use methods of participant comprehension, sensory ethnography, participant sensing, and artistic practice. The role of the interviews in helping me select the themes shaped my theoretical conversation and the three interventions that comprise my dissertation: audio, video, and written. Industrial mitigations of risk fetishize HIV status and HIV criminalization in ways that stigmatize queer and HIV-positive sexual practices, communities, and cultures. Risk—as idea and practice—is multidimensional and has been important in HIV/AIDS art/activism since long before AIDS industrialization. I talk about biopolitics and respond to disciplinary- and bio-power through Foucault’s concept of pastoral power and his politics of aesthetic self-creation. I understand (and use) risk as a response to hetero- and homo-normative codes, laws, and imperatives.

As a ludic counternarrative to homonormativity, I explore constellations of risky sexual and artistic practices as sites of self-creation through the concept of a dynamic continuum of risk that documents, across four decades of AIDS, the outlaw risky sex practices (anonymous, bathhouses, cruising, public sex) that have thrived in *every* era. I use this concept as a way to understand a collection of practices that argue against industrial mitigations of risk and the normative and gentrifying impacts these mitigations produce: communities of banality and compliance. Through examination and material production of art that responds to risk in AIDS and queer creative and sexual practices, I conclude that practices and processes of making and responding to art create an escape from the precarity of sexual marginalization, homonormativity, and gentrification.

Risky Beeswax is dedicated to Robert Flack (1957-1993),
his eternal cosmic love machine,
his theatre of blood,
and his love magic.

"I was flakey before it was fashionable." — R. Flack

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Introduction

AIDS, art, sex, and risk. *My body is on record.*

In this work, I explore (and record) the productive possibilities of risk in AIDS, art, and sex in two primary ways: 1) I examine the artistry and activism of cultural producers who have responded to the AIDS crisis historically and into the present, and 2) I respond in sonic form. I use four central themes that emerged through interviews—risking the personal; (ludic or radical or risky) sexual ecologies; the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), their intersections, and risky representations; and art, artistic practice, and risk—from multiple perspectives.¹ The work culminates in a series of audio and visual productions that take up and respond to these ideas in order to make the case for the ludic possibilities of a new queer sexual ecology/citizenship that embraces (rather than controls) risk. Through deliberate engagement with wordplay, disco, and dance, I argue that arts practice-oriented expressions and understandings of sexual risk that respond to and transcend HIV/AIDS industrial mitigations of risk in the mainstream must keep pace and engage with the persistent and evolving narratives of risk in the sexual practices of men who have sex with men (MSM) specifically and AIDS in general.² Like many queer thinkers/fuckers before me, I imagine sex as

¹ As Giovanna Di Chirro writes, “[i]n environmental studies, the term ‘ecology’ [...] describes the web of relationships and interconnections among organisms and their ‘homes’ [and] Thinking of the body as home/ecology [...] provides an apt metaphor and material grounding for constructing an embodied ecological politics that articulates the concepts of diversity, interdependence, social justice, and ecological integrity” (2010.220). In 1997, Gabriel Rotello used “sexual ecology” to encapsulate AIDS and the destiny of gay men, not without controversy. I use “sexual ecologies” at the crossroads of Di Chirro’s “ecology,” Rotello’s contentious destiny, and concepts of queer ecologies where sex and sexualities insert into the natural landscape by way of public sex practices and cruising. Specific to my dissertation, sexual ecologies include diverse relationships—anonymous, group, fantasy-led, undirected and ludic—that emerge in queer socio-sonic and -sexual spaces as meaningful social contact. As Sandilands and Erikson note, “wilderness becomes a ‘safe’ place for outlaw sex” (2010.3).

² *HIV/AIDS industrial mitigations of risk*—and *AIDS industry*—are terms that I use to organize the pharmaceutical industrial complex’s activities around and methods for the reduction of HIV transmission. These mitigations

a form of aesthetic self-creation, a creative pleasure practice rather than a necessarily procreative one.

AIDS, art, sex, and risk. *My body is on record.*

Responding to my rough notes on the vexed intersection of HIV and disability, artist Robert Bolton developed the phrase “my body is on record” for my audio intervention. Through a series of iterative variations, Bolton connects and subverts “record” in multiple ways: as biopolitical data and reporting (vital to the relationships of AIDS, art, sex, and risk in the era of AIDS industry), documentation, criminal evidence, history, information, the vinyl phonograph record (a central object, method, and intervention in my dissertation), and processes of committing audio to tape (analogue) or as data (digital). “When I’m turned on, there’s always that red light lit. When my body is on record” Bolton sings, imaginatively entangling lust (being turned on) with the red light in the audio recording studio, a light that (paradoxically) demands silence. This red light can also summon sexual images, districts, sounds, warnings, and metrics of desire, heat, love, and risk. Importantly, *my body is on record* underscores the role of music in my dissertation, my creative practice as it overlaps with my life as a queer artist and the disco as a site of celebration, resistance, socio-sexual inquiry, and action. The disco: a temple of collective energy-raising, ritual worship, and place- and identity-making; a socio-sonic location of queer spirit and spirituality where music motivates salvific, sensual, sexual movement and vibrotactile interactions.

include pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), the medically approved method for HIV transmission reduction, first released in 2005; and U=U, the current standard in HIV/AIDS treatment goals, which stands for *undetectable=untransmittable*. U=U relates to persons living with HIV who, through successful adherence to highly active, anti-retroviral therapy (HAART), which was released in 1996, can reduce the presence of the virus in their body to an “undetectable” status and are, thus, unable to transmit the virus.) I am undetectable, not silent.

AIDS, art, sex, and risk. *My body is on record.*

“There’s certain music and science to it. When my body is on record” (Bolton). Music and specific recordings, and people, places, and movements in music have directed ways for me to find myself, my queer identity, take risks, and understand capacities of love, lust, and fantasy in my life. Glam rock offered me an aspirational, generative, relatable map in 1972-1973 when normative codes, laws, and imperatives failed to do so. The relatively safe gay space of disco revealed and produced community. The disco continues to work like *zōe*: an infinite flow of vital energy that can be tapped into and resume at any time. The disco recharges. In this work, I use AIDS, art, sex, and risk; and disco, dance, and music’s potency to examine the risk to live and the right to love.

The risk to live. The right to love.

Paul B. Preciado recorded (in writing) that sentiment in my copy of his *Countersexual Manifesto*. Condensing ideas exchanged in the two very brief conversations we shared, Preciado inscribed it during a 2019 appearance at Toronto’s iconic Glad Day Bookstore and LGBTQI community nest. Preciado’s bold and personal hand-written record creates an important bridge in my project about AIDS, art, sex, and risk in the era of AIDS industry by identifying the risk of life itself, making critical connections between risk (in life, love, and sex) and human rights, and concepts of aesthetic self-creation. This bridge is, for me, strengthened through my HIV-positive perspective: a perspective developed through the discursive methods, like medical and government forms that document my body: my body is on record. Living with HIV is risky and loving is earned. Preciado’s dedication also underscores the importance of his countersexual thinkings and practices as “technologies of resistance” (Preciado 2019b.21). These technologies

of resistance entangle with the kinds of intellectual and epistemological disobedience (Mignolo 2015.107) that are crucial to creating movement that advances open, playful, serious sexual discourse in the academic institution, in general, and queer theory, specifically. Preciado's dedication risks the personal. Preciado is an important interlocutor in this work.

In my project, processes of making and responding to art produce a space of interpretation that is open, porous, and flexible enough to discuss risk, disobedience, and philosophies of resistance in generative ways, ways that seek to narrow the gap between the two often-polarized sites of academia and community; ways that are also, at times, both mysterious and queer. Mysteriously, art can offer, as Yoko Ono writes, "an absence of complexity, a vacuum through which you are led to a state of complete relaxation of mind" (Ono 2005.21).

After than you may return to the complexity of life again, it may not be the same, or it may be, or you may never return, but that is your problem.
(ibid)

Typical to her perspectives and practice, Ono's statement is as artful, concise, and risky as Preciado's dedication is risky and unapologetic, and Bolton's poetics are subversive and direct.

I entangle Bolton, Preciado, and Ono's creative statements to demonstrate the way that art is an important creative starting point that confronts my dissertation's central problem: AIDS produces identities and bodies that are subject to disciplinary power, surveillance, regulation, and criminalization; and desire and sexual practices that are "outlaw" (Rubin 2011.131) and/or "excessively appetitive" (Berlant and Edelman 2014.4). These identities and bodies form part of the bigger problem to which my dissertation responds by singling out and exploring a particular kind of "risk" as the key dimension of mainstream, industrial AIDS intervention. This singling out

of risk—with the intention of erasing it—creates a new set of problems, including risk-free sex after HIV/AIDS (as if HIV were ever the only risk). But AIDS is (still) not over and risk (in its multiple dimensions) remains a contentious issue despite the interventions.

One question emerges to focus my research and secure the relationship(s) between AIDS, art, sex, and risk: How can risk be understood in historical and evolving narratives of creative and (often outlaw) sexual responses to the AIDS crisis as productive contributions to individual agency, aesthetic self-creation, and meaningful, principled critiques of the pharmaceutical industrial complex, revolutionary constructions of sexual citizenship, and a reassessment of radical MSM sex as a pathway to salvific sexual ecologies, and how can art be used to inform, inspire, and liberate these movements and actions?

When I use the entanglement of Bolton, Preciado, and Ono, I creatively and actively represent the narrative power inherent in art and artistic practice (especially music) that I argue for in this project. In this entanglement, they put words to the relationship between risk and art that girds my research. In risky and fearless terms, art can produce Ono's *absence of complexity* through an open and flexible space of interpretation that empowers change in individual ways of being and seeing and listening. Making and responding to art is personal and productively problematizing. In poetic and metaphorical terms, Bolton subverts "record" to give the word multiple meanings and textures. Life, as Preciado implies, is risky. Love and the sexual expressions that convey love—even and especially through anonymous sexual encounters—are human and risky on affective, emotional, physical, and psychological ways; they start conversations and produce meaningful social connections that can cut across boundaries of ability, age, class, gender, and race.

Why risk and risk of what? Risk of harm. Risk is the solar system that circulates around this thing in the centre that is harm. It is the relation to harm that makes something more or less risky. In this light, contracting HIV is a lesser risk in terms of radical MSM sexual practices. It is not something that you want to get, but it's no longer a death sentence. It's a chronic, manageable infection. Rather, HIV/AIDS becomes a point of departure for understanding managed self risk-taking in relation to present/future pandemic worlds and individual goals of aesthetic self-creation.

In my research into AIDS and risk in art and MSM sex in the era of AIDS industry, I interrogate and creatively respond to the industrialization—and what I read as a gentrification—of MSM sexual practices and cultures that unfold with industrial mitigations of sexual risk in relation to AIDS: 1) HAART, 2) PrEP, and 3) U=U. I explore different representations of PrEP, U=U, and so-called risky MSM sex in art and artistic practice.³

I locate risk in relation to AIDS, art, and radical MSM sex—especially condomless or bareback sex—in the following three ways: 1) Mainstream perceptions of risk in relation to radical MSM sex as a homophobic trope. 2) Risk-taking in MSM sexual practices as a form of

³ Ulrich Beck's concept of "risky society" is absent from my research due to its lack of attention to cultural differences, the different kinds of risk they produce, and his insistence on traditional forms of expertise versus experiential knowledges. His emphasis on modernization as a catalyst for manufactured risks is problematic. As Kelly Hannah-Moffat and Pat O'Malley write, "[i]n the world of modernization risks [...] traditional forms of expertise begin to break down because statistical prediction cannot work with events that have never occurred before or whose existence is unknown until they are no longer just probabilities" (Hannah-Moffat and O'Malley 2007.9). Rather than governance through risk-based techniques, modernization risks must, they write, "be governed by techniques of 'uncertainty' — speculative estimations than can locate only future possibilities rather than probabilities. A key result is that experts often fundamentally disagree and their predictions often prove wrong — hence expertise itself is opened up to challenge. [...] Beck unintentionally privileges expertise [while, on the other hand] women have long drawn on many other sources of knowledge about risks, such as experiences and feeling of health and well-being, and do not rely on expertise" (Hannah-Moffat and O'Malley 2007.9-10). Similarly, I locate managed sexual self risk-taking as forms of experiential knowledge, harm reduction, risk consciousness, and aesthetic self-creation (as documented in historical and evolving narratives of AIDS and MSM sexual practices).

aesthetic self-creation, movement toward sexual citizenship, and resistance to normativity and homophobia. 3) Disobedience and anti-normativity as queer, activist-oriented responses that risk the personal in relation to the enforcement of heterosexual codes, laws, and imperatives. This anti-normative position includes resistance to both hetero- and homo-normative patterns of behaviour where assimilation the norm is expected and practiced. I use risk as a theoretical model for intellectual, epistemological, and socio-sexual disobedience, disobedience that seeks “to undo the systems through which knowledge and knowing are constructed” (Mignolo 2015.106). Throughout this work, I seek to delink from the knowledge systems that we take for granted (and can profit from).

“Why disobey,” asks Frédéric Gros on the basis of the question of obedience. We only need to open our ears and listen. “Disobedience is in fact so justified, so normal, that what is shocking is the lack of reaction, the passivity” (Gros 2020.7). Gros’s call for ethical resistance through disobedience is broad in its scope: in a world swirling in absurdity, disobedience becomes a moral imperative. The right to love is an issue of sexual citizenship, without it we are sexiles. “[D]isobeying is a declaration of humanity,” writes Gros. The creative narratives that weave through my dissertation respond to concepts of human rights and sexual citizenship. The absurdity of hetero social and reproductive impositions on and policing of queer spirit—the “psychic and creative energies generated by people we call [...] gay” (Thompson 1987.xiii) and men who have sex with men (MSM)—is, in my research, implied and enforced in biopolitical and neoliberal managements of and investments in HIV/AIDS.

Here is the problem: PrEP (as chemical condom) and U=U (as a form of HIV-positive, or *poz*, agency and aesthetic self-creation) represent industrial safeguards and, effectively, the

death of the latex condom in relation to HIV and sex. These objects also fetishize HIV status and HIV (and sexual) criminalization in ways through which MSM sexual practices, communities, and cultures continue to be demonized and stigmatized. This fetishization imagines HIV status as a result of excessive, irrational, and/or outlaw commitment(s) to sex, as Rubin and Berlant and Edelman suggest, above. In this way, HIV criminalization can be understood as an outcome of fetishizing HIV and outlaw sexual practices. The singling out of risk with the intention of erasing it compounds these issues while also promoting narratives of homonormativity and homonationalism. Risk—as idea and practice—has, however, been an important element in HIV/AIDS art and activism since long before the advent of PrEP or U=U. Historical narratives are not nostalgic in my research; they are active facets of knowledge. Historical narratives reinstitute the salvific and creative possibilities that radical MSM sexualities and sexual ecologies bring to broader society: how we understand and interpret beauty, our bodies (their possibilities, limits, and differences), and normative ideals (and parameters) of coupledness and monogamy. These evolving narratives include the pharmaceutical industrial complex's chemical efforts, since 2005, to reduce transmission between HIV-negative people and individuals living with the virus. Moreover, these narratives can be interpreted as a kind of roadmap to the liberation of sexual ecologies for all who use sex as a balm for the pain of life. The same roadmap can be used as a starting point for understanding radical sexual ecologies in Toronto's MSM community, and the influential and salvific forms of social change and justice these practices and pursuits produce.

I explore this constellation of artistic and sexual risk in relation to AIDS through the concept of the dynamic continuum of risk (risky sexual, ludic, and artistic practices) that

documents, across four decades of AIDS, the outlaw risky sex practices (anonymous, bathhouses, cruising, public sex, and—more recently—online) that have thrived in *every* era. I arrived at this concept as a way to understanding a collection of practices that, in fact, only came to be clear in the process of doing the research. I imagine and use the concept of a “dynamic continuum” as a tool for understanding PrEP and other industrial mitigations of risk, and as a constellation or range of practices: in practices of art and sex, as an important response to my research problem, as historical and ongoing representations of disciplinary power, surveillance, regulation, criminalization, desire, and sexual activities that are commonly deemed outlaw; and the forms of self-creation that I highlight as favourable in MSM sexual practices. I use this constellation of risky artistic and sexual practices as a tool for understanding the ways that risk is always already entwined in the overarching AIDS era.

The question remains: Why is AIDS (still) not over?⁴ My research is crucially and creatively located in Toronto. The PrEP/U=U landscape and its homonormative foundations muzzle powerful narratives of self-creation that risky sexual, ludic, and artistic practices have produced (and continue to produce) and replaces them with industrial (and, I argue, gentrifying) options that remain divisive and vexed. This is important to my research in that the constellation or continuum of risk in art and sex (across four decades of AIDS) represent decidedly queer kinds of aesthetic self-creation that not only resist the normative and industrial call of the status quo, they document important and productive forms of disobedience and anti-normative resistance.

⁴ The real answer lies, of course, in global economics and politics: most of the 700,000 annual AIDS-related deaths occur in the global south).

In *Risky Beeswax*, I explore managed self risk-taking in practices of art and sex with a goal to produce creative, ludic, salvific growth and pathways to aesthetic self-creation. Ludic represents spontaneous and/or undirected play, but there are deeper—and serious—social and cultural meanings in this “play” that I will put to work — especially in relation to radical sex that produces cultural and/or community-based forms of aesthetic self-creation.⁵ Seriousness often seeks to exclude play but, as Johan Huizinga writes, “play can very well include seriousness” (Huizinga 1950.45). This sense of play, in relation to sex, involves the “affective capacities of bodies to move and be moved from one state to another, to sense, to affect and be affected by one another” (Paasonen 2018.3).

[P]layfulness allows for conceptualizing sexual selves as a being in constant, more or less subtle transformation [...] Playfulness and play [...] are central to the transformations in sexual desires, fantasies, pleasures and orientations within, in between and even despite the categories of identity across people’s lifespans. (ibid)

Ludic becomes a key concept in my dissertation as a way to challenge the rational, to impart meaning to risk; to taste the cosmos with feet planted firmly on the ground.

“Salvific” imports Christian overtones and, in this way, challenges some of the Foucauldian foundations of my research. However, my use of salvific depends less on the term’s roots in “salvation” and focuses on “salve” as a restorative balm, a reconditioning, and making sound. Moreover, there is a novel link to Foucault in this salve. As a key concept in my dissertation, this queer salvific thread weaves two strands together. The first is Foucault’s

⁵ Huizinga further writes, “play is more than a mere physiological, phenomenon or a psychological reflex. [...] It is a *significant* function—that is to say, there is some sense to it [...] which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. [...] Play as a special form of activity, as a ‘significant form’, as a social function [and] social construction [and] a cultural factor in life” (1950.1-13). Huizinga encapsulates the play concept expressed in language as follows: “Play is a thing by itself. The play-concept as such is of a higher order than is seriousness” (1950.45).

pastoral power (Foucault 1983.214) as it relates the overarching emphasis on self-creation that motivates my research. Pastoral power is an old power technique that originated in Christian institutions that can alter the individual and is “coextensive and continuous with life; it is linked with a production of truth—the truth of the individual himself” (Foucault 1983.214). The second is the vital location of spirituality and ritual in radical MSM sex practices that developed in the absence of religion in homosexuality, and homosexuality (as a recognized way of being) in religion. (The obvious exception is monastic life as a committed and immersive all-male lifestyle.) As Paasonen notes, “sexual play takes erratic routes but also follows carefully scripted choreographies resembling the ritual” (Paasonen 2018.152). In this light, salvific can convey the spiritual, the ritual, and the transcendent in queer pursuits of pleasure, and their soothing, balm-like potential. The suggestion of creative and salvific growth that initiates this paragraph can foster new knowledge at the crossroads of MSM sexual practices, desire, pursuits of pleasure, sexual citizenship, and the fecund possibilities when PrEP fucks with U=U and *vice versa* in public discourse. In what ways can the space of interpretation that opens when we make or respond to art be put to work to shed light on this problem? How can risk, as an ongoing artistic undertaking, fortify the temporal as it relates to the range of risky practices in my research, and unlock risk as an entry to understanding HIV/AIDS art and activism?

The whole narrative of erasing risk—and the new set of problems it creates—also erases the constellation of risky practices (artistic and sexual) which MSM sexual practices and cultures have been entwined, including the relations among risk and (ludic) play and art. My dissertation reinserts risk, including its multiple dimensions and complex histories, into a moment that is attempting to sanitize (and gentrify) MSM sexual (and queer artistic) practice into a risk-free,

commoditized space. It does so through examination of evolving narratives of AIDS and MSM sex, and the intrinsic role that art has and continues to play in deciphering tropes of risk versus pursuits of pleasure, aesthetic self-creation, and sexual citizenship. I am going to use an aesthetics that embraces risk as a counternarrative to homonormative and homonationalist tendencies. PrEP might be an important development, but what about the rest of the sexual and artistic culture(s) that flourished in “riskier” moments of MSM and AIDS history?

Persistent narratives of risk in MSM sex and AIDS, and the *otherwise possibilities* they convey are central to my research, my argument, the primary question that guides it, and the problem it exposes. As Ashon T. Crawley writes, “[o]therwise possibilities exist alongside that which we can detect with our finite sensual capacities. [...] Imagination is necessary for thinking and breathing into the capacities of infinite alternatives” (Crawley 2019.2-3). In my research, otherwise possibilities include community- and experientially-based lessons and imaginations that have and continue to lead to reduced HIV transmission without reductions in pleasure or broader judgments of respectability and/or responsibility. Moreover, imagination is a vital location of the artistic and creative measures that I explore in response to the homonormative and homonationalist tendencies of AIDS industry.

From this junction of AIDS industry and so-called risky MSM sexual practices, I ask: What elements of biopolitical and neoliberal power are entangled with these constellations of risky practices, and how can these entanglements be used to understand aesthetic self-creation in relation to art, sex, and risk? I activate this query not just through theory but through my dissertation’s creative interventions, the material processes and productions of my interviewees, and my positionality. As a white queer-identified artist living and aging with HIV, I

seek to use the privileges of my positionality to benefit others in ways that disrupt modalities of normativity (as a trope of identity-making and legibility through legal frameworks), homonormativity, and homonationalism. Importantly, the risks and privileges inherent in art, activism, risk, and MSM sexual ecologies (and experiences) can open new doors of knowledge and understanding to narrow the gap between academia and community.

Understanding risk—specifically managed self risk-taking in practices of art and sex in relation to HIV/AIDS—is important to understanding the arts-oriented approach that my research takes, as a learning and liberating escape from (homo)normative, homophobic, moralistic, and/or marginalizing social orders, operations, and operators, and the precarity of sexual marginalization; and as a means to underscore the experiential and personal power inherent in making and responding to art. Through engagement with the textures of this learning and liberating escape, my research problematizes biopolitical and neoliberal managements of and investments in HIV/AIDS in the era of AIDS industrialization, chronic disease treatment, and “the new chronic” (Cazdyn 2012) mode in medicine. Managed self risk-taking in this project can also be understood as a potential passage toward pleasure. As Ricky Varghese writes, “pleasure is never innocent, nor can it be meaningless. [...] Pleasure is rarely, if ever, studied for its own sake” (2019.xx-xxi). Thus, pleasure as a practice of aesthetic self-creation is a vital location of agency in my research: knowing and meaningful.

My exploration of managed self risk-taking is an interesting and original way to respond to my dissertation’s problem because it uses art and artistic practice that not only responds to radical MSM sex and AIDS, it underscores the ways that risk (in its multiple dimensions) is an ongoing artistic undertaking. Risk’s multiple dimensions provide a fundamental set of concepts

and practices on which my whole dissertation rests. Risk is my central site of inquiry: it is at play in both PrEP and U=U, and it is at play in my commitment to managed self risk-taking as a practice of self-fashioning or aesthetic self-creation before, during, and after PrEP and U=U. Risk is ever present and multidimensional (as discussed below) in life, sex, and art. “The discovery of, and intervention against, risks,” write Hannah-Moffat and O’Malley, “leads to the search for more risks, but each new discovery only makes it clearer that our security was illusory: life is endless risks” (Hannah-Moffatt 2007.10-11).

I think in and through art and artistic practice as a specific realm in which risk is put into action in different ways. The four central themes that organize my project emerged from the interviews (with artists) as specific trajectories of risking-taking are a valuable and creative response to what I identify as a continued need for risk as salvific practice. These themes are: 1) risking the personal; 2) (ludic or radical or risky) sexual ecologies; 3) HIV/AIDS, its intersections, and risky representations; and 4) art, artistic practice, and risk. These themes create important movement toward understanding this research and direct its journey. *En quatre*, they form a critical lens to divine and constellate.

The framework of my dissertation is biopolitical and biographical. As a biographical project that risks the personal, my own experiences of ludic, radical, and risky sex and art-making dance with the ideas and work of other artists whose practices respond to AIDS, risk-taking, queerness, and sex — including creative counternarratives of HIV disclosure, disruptions to concepts of safe space, art and artistic practices that use risk in productive ways, radical sexual ecologies, risky representations of AIDS, and community-based and intersectional AIDS issues of ability, age, class, gender, and race.

I position my dissertation as a countermeasure to constellations of discipline — including PrEP, U=U, and the criminalization of HIV. I embrace risk in its multiple dimensions as a ludic counternarrative. In this way, I follow Foucault's intellectual trajectory. *History of Sexuality I* documented sexual regulation as a framework of biopolitics (that is, the politics of the production and control of life). Ten years later, *History of Sexuality II* and *III* documented modes of aesthetic self-creation that could serve as countermeasures to biopolitics. I do a similar thing in my dissertation but use risk as my central point of reference.

My dissertation is going to explore this multidimensionality of risk (as ludic counternarrative), specifically through artists' worlds (others' and my own) as a way of rethinking histories of risk and reinserting them into a sexual/aesthetic world that is being billed as "risk free" through interrogation of historical and evolving narratives of AIDS, AIDS art, and MSM sex. Through this interrogation, I use creative processes and practices as vital means of knowing, being, seeing, and listening.

My dissertation includes six chapters. In Chapter One: Theory, I interrogate modalities of managed self risk-taking in practices of art and so-called transgressive sexual ecologies—such as anonymous erotic and uncertain forms of sociality, subjectivity, autonomy, and shadow publics—and in relation to HIV/AIDS and its intersections to produce escapes from the normal and a passage toward processes of self-creation. In this chapter, I discuss these issues and approaches through frameworks of biopolitics, ethics, and practices of risking the personal. The framework of biopolitics maps the evolution of homosexual identity and the transition from disciplinary power to Foucault's notion of pastoral power as aesthetic self-creation. The section on ethics examines ethopolitics, and gap between philosophical/somatic and moral ethics, queer

liberation theory and sexual citizenship, risk thinking and management, and the utopian promise of MSM pornography as one of intensity, plentitude, and pleasure when it is organized through documentary strategies versus fiction and (strictly) fantasy. In the final section, I explore the ways that risking the personal and new sexual ecologies can open new ways to think and experience lives of pleasure that resist hegemonic and homophobic norms and operations. In *making the private public*, we can set ourselves free and, at the same time, free those individuals who—in reading and responding to personal narratives—can relate.

Chapter Two: Method explores three entwined research methods: 1) participant comprehension (Savastano) and sensory ethnography (Pink); 2) interviews and ethnography; and 3) creative process and material production or arts practice as research method (Barone and Eisner, Sullivan). As a philosophical and arts-oriented interrogation that examines self risk-taking and practices of risking the personal, I use arts practice-oriented research strategies, methods, and material representations to make sense of the immanent complexities and contradictions — and risks. These methods inform the collaborative processes and often creative results that emerge from interviews with artists, curators, and activists; and creative practices and material production that respond to biopolitical and neoliberal managements of and investments in HIV/AIDS, including my own studio work (as material research). Arts practice as research method unfolds through participant interviews and socio-sonic and sexual field recordings; practices and processes of sound, listening, visibility, writing; concepts of queer phenomenology, spatiality, and temporality (queer location and orientation, space, time, space, and experiential knowledge). Through this unfolding three interventions explore, translate, and

represent this beeswax of risk: audio, video, and written.⁶ Through these transdisciplinary material productions, I am going link and re/present the individual, social, and political motivations and interiorities that can provoke, prohibit, liberate, criminalize, incite, mobilize, and transform MSM sex practices and the rapidly evolving—and revolutionary—public conversations about so-called risky sex that emerge in the era of AIDS industry.

Chapter Three: Participants outlines the artist, activist, and curator interviewees, their creative ideas and practices in relation to AIDS and/or risk and/or sex, the participant selection rationale (and the pivotal role of AIDS Action Now's [AAN] PosterVirus project in the selection process), and recruitment and outreach. This chapter contributes to my dissertation as a guide to select artists and practices that resonate with issues of AIDS, sex, and risk.

Chapter Four: Variations on Themes of Risk is a descriptive narrative created using the interviews that identifies the four themes that guide my research (above); and recognizes the historical, evolving, and persistent narratives of risk in MSM sex practices and HIV/AIDS through and across four decades, and the role of more recent chemical offerings that draw historical narratives of sex and AIDS into public conversations and understandings. As an important contribution to my dissertation, I put some interview passages to work in the audio intervention. Additionally, this chapter contributes to the overall aesthetic character and goals of my dissertation by risking the personal (through participant perspectives and disclosures), identifying some of the ways that risking the personal can create self-traumatization, revealing

⁶ I use "beeswax" in my dissertation as a childish or queer (ecological) turn to "business," as in "It's none of your beeswax." As medicine, beeswax can be used for lowering cholesterol and for relieving pain. It is also used for swelling (inflammation), ulcers, diarrhea, and hiccups. Wax itself is, importantly, part of audio recording history and the reproduction of sound. Originally, recordings were captured on cylinders and wax was the media that captured the sound waves. As material recording evolved, the term "wax" was retained as slang for long-play (LP) vinyl records.

the ongoing role of risk in artistic practice, and disrupting concepts of safe space which, in turn, performs a kind of disobedience.

Chapter Five: Risky Listening lists four audio interventions. Each audio work addresses one of the four themes that organize my research. The audio intervention is a critical contribution to my dissertation because it gathers and uses the following: the role of sound, music, and listening in my research and studio practice; theories and practices of sound that are explored in selected literatures; the fulfillment of arts practice as research method; the affective, risky, and sensory elements that are critical to participant comprehension and sensory ethnography; the function of sound and DJ (as semionaut) culture in the kinds of socio-sonic spaces that I examine and the role these spaces, sounds, and times play in MSM sexual practices and cultures. This chapter contributes to my dissertation as an original a/r/tography.

In Chapter Six: Becoming Sound and Soft Subversions, I present a substantive discussion of what each chosen piece contributes to overall understandings of the original problematic of art/sex/risk. This discussion includes interview materials, focuses on specific artworks, and deepens the discourse of sound and the vinyl phonograph in my research. This chapter contributes to my dissertation through the concept of an AIDS Playlist that I put to work in my audio intervention. This playlist concept recognizes music recorded primarily in the 1970s and early 1980s as an “authentic soundtrack” to HIV, its emergence in the early 1980s (and potential incubation period in the 1970s); the thematic, lyrical, and sonic role of desire and sex in musics that were (and in some cases continues to be) familiar in gay clubs and other queer socio-sonic scenes. I also explore sound theory and the ways that ludic play (in relation to disco and house musics and cultures) can enhance both the experience of dance clubs and the role they play in

queer and MSM activist measures and cultures. This chapter is essential in listening to and activating my audio intervention.

The Conclusion presents the ways, overall, in which the dissertation intervened in the dynamic of art/sex/risk as it is identified in this Introduction. Additionally, the Conclusion addresses new questions opened up through my research process, the material representations produced by my interviewees in their respective practices, and my own material production. Since my research revolves around the AIDS pandemic, it would be amiss of me to not acknowledge the pandemic present of COVID-19. In this respect, I do not unpack COVID-19 or create dependent links to AIDS as a means of understanding risk. I do, however, create some links to understanding otherwise possibilities that may emerge more fully as the current moment unfolds — including the forms of knowledge and action that were forged by MSM sexual practices and cultures in the pre-treatment era of AIDS such as initial safer-sex protocols. This chapter contributes to my dissertation by asserting the continuum of risk, its value in relation to understanding risk in art and sex, and opening portals of possibility in pandemic present/futures.

In moving forward, I suggest that there is, quite possibly, no such thing as “risky” MSM sex. There is sex, intimate interaction and communication, pleasure, and agency. The same can be said of risk in relation to artistic practice: risk is revealed in moments of intimate and creative interaction and communication between the artist and her impulses, ideas, and materials. Risk, in artistic practice, is a productive method that can appear as a creative trick, mistake, or surprise, or all three. Risk is at the heart of ludic time: it fuels the game. Risk, in relation to raw

sex, represents a constellation of thinking comprised of noise and judgment, as I will explore in the following chapters.

It is recommended that you view my video, *Lucid Dreaming Ludic Waking*, before proceeding with further reading. Please visit: <<https://vimeo.com/449921144>>.

Chapter One: Theory

In this chapter, I examine practices of managed self risk-taking in art (especially sound and music) and MSM sex through literatures of biopolitics and ethics, and narrative practices of risking the personal. This chapter is important in relation to the rest of my dissertation as a ground for digging through and seeding ideas that are put to work, through my methods, and analysed in my creative interventions. I put my ear to this ground and listen and *sound* (that is, make some noise).

Risk starts conversations. The conversation that I make with these literatures and narrative practices are instrumental to my dissertation: they form an intellectual and philosophical platform upon which I respond to my central problem and produce a map (or experimental notational score) to some of the ideas that sound in my creative interventions. Through this creative examination, I use four concepts to analyse, anchor, develop, and sound my research: 1) normativity (as a metric of possibility of difference); 2) gentrification (as a contemporary iteration and enforcement practice of normativity); 3) biopolitical practices of self-care and aesthetic self-creation in contrast with neoliberal practices of self-optimization that transform self-care into a kind of socio-industrial productivity and PrEP into a form of industrialized sexual absolution (and how the differences matter to historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and AIDS in the PrEP/U=U landscape); and 4) the integrity (and necessity) of imaginative and creative sex and *obscene perverse pleasure* in being queer through the activation of *queer's honour* (Haver 1999a.xi). The third concept is significant as a location of mapping the changes from disciplinary power (biopolitics) through new neoliberal technologies of power that, as I examine, shift from the body to the psyche. Where the church and institutions of

marriage used to provide platforms for sexual absolution, industrial mitigations of risk now perform a similar task through so-called responsible and recognized forms of “safety.” I layer these concepts throughout the four themes that emerged in my interviews and organize my dissertation (and this chapter).

Through sound—literally (through my creative interventions), figuratively (as an audio artist who thinks through practices of sound and listening), and actively (as a verb)—I draw attention to the vital location of creativity and imagination that music plays (and makes) in my dissertation, my research focus on AIDS and risk, and the obvious (and often expected) route to velocity and volume that this kind of sound—or *sounding*—might take. As a twenty year-old picking up a guitar or sitting behind a drum kit, I made a loud noise to produce tension and make a statement. As a sixty-something white queer artist living and aging with HIV, my ways of producing tension are now less exclusively conditioned by volume. Imagine a silent scream. Silence is sexy too and I want these silences and sounds (and movements) to sound out and mix in with the creative, evolving, persistent, risky, narratives of MSM sex and AIDS. Hey mister DJ.

Understanding risk—specifically managed self risk-taking in practices of art and sex in relation to AIDS—is important to understanding the arts-oriented approach that my research takes as an active learning and process-led exploration of and escape from the precarity of sexual marginalization, and normative and gentrifying social orders, operations, and operators. “Sexuality,” as Gayle Rubin writes, should be treated with special respect in times of great social stress” (Rubin 2011.138).

I selected the major literatures that drive this chapter, and my dissertation at large, for their different perspectives on and special respect for AIDS, MSM sex, queerness, and the ways

these perspectives contrast with normative notions of citizenship, respectability, productivity, and sex. Importantly, many of the selected literatures risk the personal, and link sex and difference with tropes of creativity and aesthetic self-creation. I examine biopolitical and neoliberal managements of and investments in HIV/AIDS as industrializing and gentrifying, and explore the transition from disciplinary power to more affect-oriented neoliberal technologies of power. I use different ethical perspectives that show how radical MSM sexual engagement and experience can lead to aesthetic self-creation and meaningful social contact that cuts across boundaries of age, ability, class, gender, and race.

In my research, the PrEP/U=U landscape blankets the powerful narratives of aesthetic self-creation that risky practices of MSM sex and art have produced. In this act of blanketing or covering, the creative and productive possibilities (and sounds) are muted and recorded over with authoritative, industrial messages that remain divisive and normalizing instead of opening space for new, liberating sounds. This muting is an attempt to normalize HIV. Living with HIV is anything but normal. In my dissertation, normalization of HIV in MSM communities is a form of gentrification, a gentrification of MSM imaginations, minds, and artistic and sexual practices; a numbing of lived experiences and stigmas that is accompanied by a curious and submissive acceptance. Muting, however, does not erase the underlying message: AIDS is (still) not over. "There is a gentrification that happens to buildings and neighborhoods," writes Sarah Schulman, "and there is a gentrification that happens to ideas. [...] There is a weird passivity that accompanies gentrification [and] a hypnotic identification with authority" (Schulman 2013.29-34). In this chapter, pharmaceutical giant Gilead will play the role of authority with PrEP as its prop.

The role of this chapter is multivalent. The large questions that drive this chapter, are as follows: What happens when we risk the personal in ways that produce “new forms of relationship, desire, and affect” (Preciado 2019b.128)? These risks can include disclosing HIV status, sharing stories of risk-taking, making or responding to art that is personal and risky, and more recent sexual ecologies that are organized around PrEP’s *chemical condom* (ibid). What are the misgivings of so-called safety and safe space? If we (as gay-identified men or MSM) are willing to accept the multiple impositions of risk-taking in everyday life, under the guise of freedom in particular (often without much question or debate or even imagining otherwise), why do we also continue to submit to the enforcement of preinvented, marginalizing, moralizing, and homophobic judgments and values established by colonial heteropatriarchal regimes and “sexual monolingualism” (Preciado 2019b.8)? Why, as gay-identified men or MSM, do we suppress, deny, or demonize practices of risk-taking that may improve life—and sexual life in particular—as praxis? In what ways is sex important in biopolitics and how can ludic, radical, or risky sexual ecologies help individuals break free of biopolitical constraints such as disciplinary power? What is normal?

Risk itself is a more multi-valent concept and practice than can be measured according to one dimension like PrEP. Historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and AIDS are a source of aesthetic self-creation and social revolution for MSM. These narratives documented sexual experimentation that reimagined desire, pleasure, and the limits of MSM bodies in the 1970s, and translated community-based knowledge and action into safer-sex protocols in the 1980s. For sexual MSM living with HIV, U=U is self-creation.

Importantly, in my interrogation of biopolitics, I explore oneiric spaces and times that, like *queer time*, open portals of possibility through art and artistic practice in particular, and resist normativity. Dreaming, like imagination, opens spaces that are flexible. Flexibility confronts normative categories and codes. Queer time is a way of thinking about queerness as “an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices” (Halberstam 2005.1). Time management is commonly adjusted to the schedule of normativity (Halberstam 2005.7). In my research, “queer” refers, as Halberstam writes, “to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time” (Halberstam 2005.6). The gay bathhouse is “an exemplary historical object for dialectical imagining” (Chisholm 2005.36). Thus, imagination can be understood as being in alignment with distinctly queer space and time; and dreaming can be understood as an extension of the imagination. “‘Dreaming’,” as Scarry writes, “sustain[s] the objectifying powers of people during the hours when they are cut off from the natural source of objects, so that they do not during sleep drown in their own corporeal engulfment” (Scarry 1985.167).

The appropriateness of identifying imagining as a boundary condition of intentionality may, then, be recognized in the fact that imagining provides an extra and extraordinary ground of objects beyond the naturally occurring ground; it actively “intends,” “authors,” or “sponsors” objects when they are not passively available as an already existing “given.” (ibid)

In these ways, imagining, dreaming, and queer space and time intersect, in my dissertation, as an axis of understanding that I call *lucid dreaming ludic waking*. I put this phrase to work in my writing and my video intervention.

Arts-oriented representations of AIDS and MSM sex are vital to my central research problem. Art can effectively respond to industrial AIDS technologies of mitigating risk by

starting new and different conversations, conversations that allow risk, desire, and pleasure to sound. I use art that keeps pace with and documents the constellations of risky artistic, ludic, and sexual practices. Similarly, I use the recombinant teleological sonic narratives that fuel the disco dance floor through sound, visuals, movement, and culture. Using this constellation of risky practices and recombinant teleologies as counternarratives to industrial mitigations of risk that I argue are important but far too wholesome—too normative—in their media representation to advance consequential conversations about queer sex, desire, and pleasure. This industrial mitigation, in my research, produces a normalizing, gentrifying effect on MSM sex, relations, and identity. Conversely, historical and evolving narratives of risky and ludic AIDS art and MSM sex are imaginative transformation in action, a “making-real” (Scarry 1985.21) of queer worlds, an escape from the “preinvented world” (Wojnarowicz 1991.116) and its harmful pathologizations. Risky artist, ludic, and sexual practices invigorate salvific sexual ecologies where difference, singularity, and pleasure flourish in community-making ways.

Making and responding to art about AIDS and/or radical MSM sex can help us understand how PrEP is much more than just an effective method of HIV transmission reduction. Importantly, I recognize the PrEP/U=U landscape as just one way to question self risk-taking in relation to sex and HIV/AIDS, not the answer. As Preciado writes, “[f]uck freely — fuck with the pharmakon. [...] Gay sexuality has passed from the state of marginal subculture to that of a codified space, regimented by the languages of neoliberal capitalism. (Preciado 2019a.129). Making and responding to art are codified spaces that break free from these regimented spaces and, in some case, rational thinking altogether.

Voluntary self risk-taking is an interesting and original way to respond to my dissertation's problem because it uses art, music, and creative practice that represent radical sex and AIDS (images, sounds, and statements that resist hegemonies of normativity), and it underscores the ways that risk is an ongoing artistic undertaking. Risk is on the minds of MSM when they engage in anonymous sexual situations. As Marlon Riggs conveys in his documentary *Tongues Untied* (1989), "now we think as we fuck." Though Riggs expressly addresses risky sex in the pre-treatment AIDS era, "now we think as we fuck" continues to resonate through radical MSM sexual communities and behaviours regardless of colour in the era of AIDS industry, and I re-engage this citation as a chorus or chant in my audio piece, "Any Clinic Any Club (Herd Immunity Mix)."

Managed self risk-taking is embedded in my research through my own HIV-positive status disclosure and the problematic timing (or out-of-time) of my seroconversion in the larger trajectory of AIDS in Toronto. Additionally, each participant interviewed in my dissertation brings unique and creative examples of managed self risk-taking to this project through their ideas and creative production(s). These constellations, actions, and processes of self-creation can be used in the struggle for sexual citizenship (as a pursuit of belonging and a protection of privacy) and queer liberation (as a pursuit of distinctive identity, pronounced difference, and intentional misfitness in relation to *status quo* comforts). In the bigger picture of art institutionalization and avenues of funding that supposedly support art and artistic practices, intentional misfitness is mostly silenced, absent. As artist and activist Syrus Marcus Ware writes, "there is a perception that the arts are liberal, open places where everyone gets to be a free spirit, everyone can be whomever they want to be [...] that weirdness is encouraged, that misfits fit in"

(Ware 2020b). These misfit, othered voices are often erased or ignored when they risk speaking out about the personal, experiential, and the systemic resistances to other than normative ideas and representations. These constellations, actions, and self-creations can also be used in the struggle against AIDS shame, stigma, fear, and uncertainty, and normative, gentrified operations (and operators) that seek to demonize MSM sex in general and sexual practices of HIV-positive people specifically.

In this chapter, I observe the affective yet ambivalent responses to practices of risking the personal that reveal forms of privilege: not all people are positioned to write and share their personal narratives, in—or out of—an academic context. Some people are not prepared to divulge the personal in public spheres, to share and document sensitive information in writing. However, as Gros notes, “[t]he public self is our political intimacy” (Gros 2020:8). Gros’s statement underscores the validity and importance of intimacy in political and public realms, though the results can vary. Disclosure of HIV status is a form of public intimacy and risk-taking that can swing in either direction—harm or harm reduction—depending on the context of the disclosure and the frame(s) of information and understanding in the reception of such disclosure.

This chapter is organized through the four themes that emerged during participant interviews. The role of the interviews in helping me select the themes also shaped Chapter One’s theoretical conversation. I keep these themes front-of-mind through three sections: 1) Biopolitics (the politics of the production and control life, especially sexual and MSM lives), 2) Ethics (to underline the philosophical, not moral, boundaries of HIV-positive and pharmacopornographic lives), and 3) Risking the Personal (to draw my interrogation back to the

primary issue: risk). My readings across this interdisciplinary spectrum shape the questions that will be present in the remainder of my dissertation (including the creative interventions) by contrasting difference perspectives that entwine with (historical, evolving, and personal) narratives of risky and ludic sex and art in the AIDS era, challenge the PrEP/U=U landscape and industrial mitigations of risk, and the homogenizing effect of gentrification on MSM minds and imaginations.

My constellation of writers and creative responses (visual; sonic; interdisciplinary; mixed and new media, and text- and language-based including poetry, instructions, and *truisms*) are drawn from a spectrum of individuals that represent mostly nonwhite and non-straight perspectives and experiences, and non-canonical academia. Writers include Gloria Anzaldúa, Marlon M. Bailey, Judith Butler, Anne Cvetkovich, Tim Dean, Samuel R. Delany, Michel Foucault, David Halperin, Byung-Chul Han, William Haver, Julian Henriques, Francisco Ibáñez-Carrasco, Paul Morris, Nick Mulé, Susanna Paasonen, Paul B. Preciado, Gayle Rubin, Elaine Scarry, and Ricky Varghese.

I interrogate risk in relation to AIDS, art, and sex through biopolitical and ethical frameworks that evidence historical and evolving narratives of risky MSM sex and art, and AIDS, in relation to or in contrast with normative and gentrified worlds, disobedience (as a vital location of activism and social change), citizenship (biological, biomedical, and sexual), and so-called utopian promises of pornography as a documentary practice. I weave this evidence with histories of sexuality, theories of gay subjectivity and queer liberation, and narrative threads that bring texture to these narratives of risk. I locate cruising and other so-called transgressive forms of public sex, the ludic, radical, and risky possibilities of MSM sex (historically and in the salvific,

otherwise possibilities for broader society in the present/future) as a template for intersectional, forward movement. The section on ethics includes explorations of ethopolitics, HIV-criminalization and the so-called war on sex, and MSM sex as liberating movement toward social change and justice. Following these explorations, I examine concepts and practices of risking the personal to underline the centrality of art and artistic practice in my overall argument, and the role of risk as an ongoing artistic undertaking.

To begin, I outline the key debates and points that drive my dissertation. I follow this outline with a parsing (titled *I Want More*) of the 2018 commercial for the leading PrEP treatment, Truvada (manufactured by Gilead). The commercial's commentary reveals new sexual possibilities, but only in the most coded, guarded, and normative language. I use this commercial as a way to begin understanding PrEP as an industrial mitigation of risk that simultaneously produces gentrifying effects on MSM in ways that mute historical narratives of risky MSM art and sex, and outright ignores U=U.

Debates and Key Points

In my research, I explore the following three key debates through theoretical, methodological, and material production: 1) Risking the personal. This debate is critical to aesthetic self-creation in sectors of risky MSM sex, art, and AIDS because it unearths issues and experiential knowledge that reveal a paucity of institutional research versus the kinds of expertise that are mostly required under normative conditions. Risking the personal in art and sex produces counternarratives that can bridge gaps in lives of marginalized and sexually non-normative people, and people living with disability and chronic illness. Risking the personal, as I reveal, is a

form of aesthetic self-creation can be both difficult and salvific. 2) Play: Play, and the expression I use in my research—ludic—is often misunderstood. What happens when art and sex are approached from a starting point of play? Art, music, and creativity in general require play and a playful mindset in order to a) get going and b) get to the so-called juicy stuff. I am going to explore the otherwise possibilities when art and sex are loosened from lines of productivity and so-called responsibility through ludic work/play. 3) Safety: What is the status of safe in the PrEP/U=U landscape? What are the benefits and/or misgivings of so-called safety and safe space? My dissertation reads (homo)normativity and its materialities and gentrifications not as safe passage but as a vampiric propaganda wing of neoliberalism, one that sucks the radical joy from MSM sexual practices and cultures. I am going to explore the ways that (homo)normativity trades queer spirit for so-called safely monetized, mortgaged, and soullessly networked forms of social acceptance — in sickness, health, and death.

Any understanding of art/sex/risk in the current, PrEP-U=U landscape must attend to histories of risk in relation to HIV/AIDS. I put these debates to work in my research in relation to narratives of risky MSM sex and art, and HIV/AIDS, and other dimensions of risk that my work identifies so that risk can be understood as a method of escape from normative and gentrified worlds. These worlds can be understood in more creative terms as the preinvented world which artist and AIDS activist David Wojnarowicz describes as, “[a] place where by virtue of having been born centuries late one is denied access to earth or space, choice or movement. The bought-up world; the owned world. The world of coded sounds: the world of language, the world of lies” (Wojnarowicz 1991.88).

From these multi-modal theoretical, methodological, narrative, and practice-oriented perspectives, debates, and constellations, I put the three key points to work. The first is disobedience. At the heart of activism, disobedience underscores risking the personal when it speaks the unspeakable, acts up, and listens to and produces so-called counternarratives. I use disobedience, as Preciado instructs, to “[e]xplode the semantic field and the pragmatic domain” (2019b.107). Disobedience can lead to acts of “epistemological rupture, a disavowal of category, [and can resist] the various social, discursive technologies [and] political practices of controlling truth and life” (ibid). Disobedience can, like activism, create change in relation to AIDS, its intersections and risky representations by resisting normative, gentrifying, and industrial codes and imperatives. As Preciado writes, “[h]ere is our epistemological situation: we need a new model of intelligibility that is more open, less hierarchical” (2019a.83).

The second point comprises industrial mitigations of risk that have produced new ways to extend HIV-positive lives, extensions that come with hidden costs such as crisis which always looms on the horizon and life-long complicity with AIDS industry. Biopolitical and neoliberal managements of and investments in AIDS are vital locations of production and control of MSM lives, sexual practices, and cultures. Art and artistic practices that respond to these productions and controls can produce a “critical reappropriation of biopolitical techniques and their pharmacopornographic devices” (Preciado 2020a). Pharmacopornographic activism in relation to AIDS includes fighting the “biomedical models, advertising campaigns, governmental and nongovernmental health organizations, genome-sequencing programs, pharmacological industries, intellectual property, bio patents, trademarks, definitions of risk groups, clinical assays, and protocols” (Preciado 2013.337).

The third and final point is aesthetic self-creation as a response to biopower. Biopolitical tropes of disciplinary power leave individuals powerless in their quest for identity. Aesthetic self-creation is critical to narratives of MSM sex and art, and AIDS. I discuss aesthetic self-creation through Foucault's pastoral power.

I Want More

Science, technology, the market, are today re-drawing the limits of what is now, and what will be tomorrow, a living human body. [...] In the current industrial mutation, the body and sexuality occupy the place occupied by the factory in the nineteenth century. —Paul B. Preciado (2019b.48-49)

"I'm on the pill," "I'm on the pill," "I'm on the pill." The repetitive refrain offered by talking heads in pharmaceutical giant, Gilead's, (2018) commercial for their leading PrEP treatment, Truvada™, form a simple constellation straight from HIV/AIDS intersectionality: youthful representations of race, gender, orientation.⁷ Absent from this constellation is age, class, disability, and any evidence of queerness or challenges to the norm. It is the nature, after all, of the industrial AIDS complex to reduce living with HIV to the least complicated, quotidian terms — and to project futures that, as Preciado suggests, re-draw the limits of the living human body.

Gilead's talking heads are energetic, intersectional, mobile, and ready for more. The closing head, a Black male at the centre of four mixed gender dancers of colour, dressed in steely blue and grey sweats, and rehearsing routines in a movement studio, exclaims, "I wanted to do more." In the studio's mirror, large black letters spelling DANCE, are reflected backwards and, in this turn, perform as a coded surtitle. "I wanted to do more [than dance backwards]." For

⁷ <<https://www.truvada.com>>; 21 November 2018, 21:18.

argument's sake, and for the sake of forward-movement, I collapse the dancer's statement to its essence: I want more. More of what, exactly?

Gilead's mitigations of risk are tuned in ways that run interference with queer spirit — spirit that is inherently risky, disobedient (in social and activist ways), and "perfectly unreasonable" (Morris and Paasonen 2019.146) in relation to biopolitics and the creation of queer worlds of difference. In my interrogation of Gilead's commercial—in relation to MSM sexual community and in intersection with risking the personal—the answer is simple: pleasure. The kinds of sexual pleasure that result from managed self risk-taking and playful pursuits of sexual self-creation. Yet, pleasure remains a contentious issue. As Varghese writes, "sustained conversations concerning pleasure—what gives us pleasure, how we might seek it out or retrieve it, what it says about our deepest desires or our more intimate fantasies—still seem to be a matter of taboo. A kind of silence shrouds any rigorous examination of pleasure" (2019.xvii). I do not pussyfoot around pursuits of pleasure in my dissertation.

I recognize that Gilead's commercial is a form of artistic response. Advertising is a creative field and some of the best art talents occupy ad agencies. It's one way to make a living as an artist — audio, visual, writing. But this kind of creativity also conforms to agendas that limit creativity, agendas that are guided by economic concerns and goals instead of imagination. In similar fashion, Truvada requests measures of conformity in its users through strict complicity with regime, the notion that safer sex protocols are still necessary, and the elimination of interactive sexual health discourse between partners. Fuck different, queer forms of communication, PrEP (allegedly) says it all.

The commercial's commentary reveals new sexual possibilities, but only in the most coded, guarded, "safe" language. This language pulls no punches and is not surprising for a leader in the so-called pharmaceutical industrial complex, a sector that profits from setting and maintaining the status quo for public health and, importantly, resisting controversy. The name "Gilead" originates from the bible, a name for three persons and two geographic places — significantly, "hill of testimony" and "rocky region." In the Book of Hosea, Gilead is described as "stained with blood" (Hosea 6:8). The Republic of Gilead is also the name of the totalitarian patriarchal theocracy and region in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The Testament* (2019). In *Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders* (2020), Delany fictionalizes an island run by lesbians called Gilead. In this "improbable community," mixed race MSM "used to suck each other's dicks and fuck each other's assholes every chance they got" (Delany 2020.216). Gilead, the pharmaceutical giant, focuses primarily on antiviral drugs used in the treatment of HIV, hepatitis B and C, and influenza. In 2018, Gilead reaped a revenue of 22.13 billion US\$, a figure that is not insignificant in relation to the kinds of normative, gentrified, and redescriptive language that is put to work through the corporation's mediated efforts to create desire in their clients while skirting the thornier issues of and difficult conversations about managed self risk-taking, and radical and risky sexual ecologies.

Gilead's primary thrust into the field of PrEP is crafted to make people want to take risks. I see it all the time in Grindr and Bareback Real Time listings and postings: "on PrEP and seeking BB." But the figure of MSM or queer sexual desire is absent in Gilead's messaging. As an industrial complex, Gilead is too tethered to respectability politics to perform some simple disobedience in relation to semiotics, marketing, and historical dialectics of risk in relation to

HIV/AIDS. Gilead resists risking the personal and the dialectics of (personal) truth that can emerge through such actions.

What is the status of safety in sexual practices that are organized around a pharmaceutical industrial complex that invites us—in coded, neutered ways—to want to take risks exclusively through PrEP? Information—as an authoritative institution of policing—can be dispersed and mobilized to discriminate against people living with HIV, enhance their surveillance (even on molecular levels), be criminalized in cases of non-disclosure, and marked socially and politically (a signature of HIV/AIDS disability) as predictive of perceived future risks, and to regulate and circumscribe behaviours and opportunities (McClelland 2019.1-2). Like gender, sexuality is political (Rubin 2011.180).

Risk opens conversations. MSM must learn to initiate regular conversations about sexual health as an erotic element of sexual interactions. Many HIV-positive individuals have been exploring conversations about personal sexual health for years, under the guise of disclosure. It's time for people to participate in sexual health conversations whether they are HIV-positive, HIV-negative, undetectable, or unknown status. Where is the concept of honest, serious, playful sexual health discourse in Gilead's messaging? These discussions are quietly and comfortably rolled into a single blue pill.

Widespread misrepresentations of HIV are a continued risk to public safety. The virus stretches sexuality beyond politics to pathology and Gilead's messaging does nothing to reduce this pathology. Gilead's talking heads are smiling, happy people without, apparently, an ethical concern among them. While articulations of unreasonable ethics revolve around the queer politics of the virus, these ethics contrast sharply with the reproductive futurism tied to the

institutions of heterosexuality (Morris and Paasonen 2019.147). Truvada has purpose and is important in the role it plays as a means to avoid a specific kind of transmission.⁸ Truvada, however, is not the one piece that invalidates all other risk. It is one piece in a larger puzzle about AIDS, art, sex, and risk.

“Truvada for PrEP, a once-daily prescription medicine for adults that when taken every day, along with safer sex practices, can lower my chances of getting HIV through sex,” states Gilead’s talking head with a warmly scripted, confident smile. Gilead’s cosy narrative ignores historical and evolving narratives of AIDS: outlaw risky sexual practices in gay bathhouses, parks, online, and anonymous hook-ups that helped to produce original concepts of safer sex protocol; and risky, ludic artistic practices that force new representations and meanings into public view (and consciousness). Gilead’s narrative positions PrEP in the glossiest terms — a key to sexual safety and new risky possibilities, and a complete disregard of U=U. As practices of sexual self risk-taking point more to generative controversy than to sustained progress, I use this work as a platform for the creation of HIV-positive individual and community agency, aesthetic self-creation, and harm reduction.

Importantly, the shift from the corporeal and disciplinary power of biopolitics is exchanged in Gilead’s message of wanting more through reflections of neoliberal technologies of power — including self-optimization and psychopolitics. Rather than the embodied and enfolded issues of HIV/AIDS, pursuits of pleasure in ludic and radical sexual ecologies can reflect

⁸ The evolution of PrEP begins in 2005 when Gilead first issued the drug (originally a composite of two HIV medications) as a means to reduce HIV transmission in HIV-negative people who are sexual, importantly people in magnetic relationships (where one person is HIV-positive, the other is HIV-negative), and women in cultures where saying “no” is not possible. Initially, PrEP courted great controversy, suspicion, and rejection but its wholesale acceptance today by community-based AIDS organizations (CBAO) and activists is across the board.

affect's layers of unconscious knowing: the impulse of desire, the quest for pleasure, the kinds of meaningful social contact (qua Delany) and connections that take place, in part, in imaginations versus pre-existing familiarities, and the kinds of connections that are triggered and established through touch, and through listening and olfactory, vibratory, socio sonic sites and the music the DJ puts to work to get people moving in such times and spaces.

Biopolitics

[D]ream functions like a virus. —Paul B. Preciado (2019a.31).

In this section, I explore historical and evolving narratives of risky MSM sex, art, and AIDS through the lens of biopolitics, disciplinary power (central to biopolitics), pastoral power (as aesthetic self-creation), and the ways biopolitics transitions to psychopolitics through neoliberalism's new technologies of power. I examine pleasure—a word usually reserved for *moments of overt disembodiment or when acute bodily sensations are experienced as something other than one's own body* (Scarry 1985.166)—and *aphrodisiac* (Foucault 1990b); cruising and other so-called transgressive forms of public sex; countersexuality; normative, gentrified, and preinvented worlds; and (homo)sexual identity and citizenship constructions. Practices of willful retention of bodily fluids in MSM sex is interrogated as anti-biopolitical and as a form of self-creation. I talk about biopolitics—with Foucault as one of my major interlocutors—in relation to the four central themes that organize my dissertation, and creative and ludic approaches through interrogation of dreaming and waking states that allow for sub- and un-conscious readings as self-creation and otherwise possibilities.

The origins of human capital, as it relates to political economy, are located in Foucault's *History of Sexuality I* through the development of bio-power and his early interrogations of

biopolitics and Western mechanisms of power. Supervision was affected through interventions and regulatory controls: “*a biopolitics of the population*” (ibid, his emphasis). Foucault notes, “[t]his bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism” (1990a.140-141).

[Capitalism] would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes [and] the growth of both these factors, their reinforcement as well as their availability and docility [...] but what occurred in the eighteenth century in some Western countries, an event bound up with the development of capitalism, was a different phenomenon having perhaps a wider impact than the new morality [...] Western [hu]man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world, to have a body, condition of existence, probabilities of life, an individual and collective welfare, forces that could be modified, and a space in which they could be distributed in an optimal manner. For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence. (Foucault 1990a.141)

Instead of thinking through Foucault’s language as it supports sovereign and disciplinary power, I respond to biopower through his concept of pastoral power and his politics of aesthetic self-creation: the production of subjects with individual agency or ipseity.

“[M]ost of the time,” writes Foucault, “the state is envisioned as a kind of political power which ignores individuals, looking only at the interests of the totality” (Foucault 1983.213).

Foucault underlines the fact that the state’s power is both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power in a “tricky combination” (ibid) of the same political structures of individualization techniques, and procedures of totalization.

[T]he modern Western state has integrated into a new political shape, an old power technique which originated in Christian institutions. We can call this power technique the pastoral power. [...] It is a form of power which does not alter just the whole community, but each individual in particular, during [their] entire life [and] cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people’s minds, without exploring their souls, without making

them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it. This form of power is salvation oriented (as opposed to political power). It is oblativ (as opposed to the principle of sovereignty); it is individualizing (as opposed to legal power) [...] In a way, we can see the state as a modern matrix of individualization, or a new form of pastoral power. [I]n this context, the [ecclesiastical] word *salvation* takes on different meanings [including] health [and] well-being. (Foucault 1983.214.215)

His notion of pastoral power, however, focuses on the analytical development of the individual (Foucault 1983.215) and, in this way, creates agency that inculcates people with measures of control over their personal, political (and pleasurable) existence — in effect, telling a truth of sex. Pastoral power exerts a positive influence over creative and sexual lives, and can optimize and multiply artistic insights, erotic power, and pleasure.

Foucault traces the historical genealogy of erotic desire in the West, and its complex and multiple articulations over 2000 years (Mulé 2019.21). Foucault effectively shows, as Mulé writes, “that sexuality, and its related modes of being, are socially constructed, historically specific and culturally contingent” (ibid). Preciado further focuses this critique, outlining Foucault’s four *dispositifs* (or sexual technologies)—the fourth of which, the psychiatrization of perverse pleasures, frames sexuality as the product of positive and productive technologies rather than as the negative result of taboos, repressions, and legal prohibitions (Preciado 2019b.75).⁹ The persistent influence of Foucauldian notions of biopower are used, as Anne

⁹ Foucault’s four sexual technologies are the hysterization of women’s bodies, the pedagogization of children’s sex, the socialization of procreative behaviors, and the psychiatrization of perverse pleasures (Foucault 1990a.104-105). Four figures emerge from the preoccupation with sex that accumulated throughout the nineteenth century, what Foucault describes as, “four privileged objects of knowledge, which were also targets and anchorage points for the ventures of knowledge: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult. Each of them corresponded to one of these strategies which, each in its own way, invested and made use of the sex of women, children, and me” (Foucault 1990a.105).

Cvetkovich writes, “to explain the politics of subject formation and new forms of governmentality” (Cvetkovich 2012.3).

Rubin describes Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* as the most influential and emblematic text of the scholarship on sex. Through critique of traditional understandings of sexuality as a “natural libido yearning to break free of constant restraint [Foucault] argues that desires are not preexisting biological entities, but rather that they are constituted in the course of historically specific social practices” (Rubin 2011.146). A radical theory of sex must, as Rubin insists, “identify, describe, explain, and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression [and] must build rich descriptions of sexuality as it exists in society and history. It requires a convincing critical language that can convey the barbarity of sexual persecution” (Rubin 2011.145). Rubin’s convincing critical language is particularly resonant in response to HIV/AIDS and sexual monolingualism. “If sex is taken too seriously,” writes Rubin, “sexual persecution is not taken seriously enough” (2011.181).

There is a systematic mistreatment of individuals and communities on the basis of erotic taste or behavior. [...] Specific populations bear the brunt of the current system of erotic power, but their persecution upholds a system that affects everyone. [...] It is time to recognize the political dimensions of erotic life. (Rubin 2011. 181)

These political dimensions underscore a politics of risk that revolves around issues of health, responsibility, respectability, and proper versus improper in relation to sex and the erotic (all vectors that are “normally” directed by law-likely operations and operators). As Halperin writes, “a revival of medical thinking about homosexuality: a style of reasoning that distinguishes ‘healthy’ from ‘unhealthy’ behaviour [makes] many stealth assumptions about good and bad

sex, functional and dysfunctional subjectivity, proper and improper human subjects” (Halperin 2007.11).

Starting from the premise that no sane person would ever put his life at risk to obtain sexual pleasure—a dubious premise at best, which acquires a specious plausibility by being grounded in unexamined normative notions about psychological health—most efforts to understand gay men’s sexual risk-taking complicate their task by setting themselves the impossible goal of explaining behavior that has already been defined as deeply irrational or incomprehensible. (ibid)

Good intentions aside, the result is to portray MSM as “beset by a number of serious psychological conditions, ranging (on the ‘victim’ end of the scale) from internalized homophobia, survivor guilt, and post-traumatic stress disorder to (on the pathological end) low self-esteem, addictive personality syndrome, sexual compulsiveness, and lack of self-control” (Halperin 2007.12). The stark realities of sexual risk may tend, writes Halperin, “to intensify the melodramatics of responsibility, intentionality, agency, and moral seriousness that already attach to the scene of gay male sex in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and that complicate the world of prevention” (2007.28). In what ways can a return to corporeal pleasure—to honour queer desire—create balance in uncertain times?

Corporeal illegibility is central to Preciado’s creative practice (writing and curation). The norm, as Preciado writes, “patrols tender bodies” (2019a.56). Virginie Despentes attends to Preciado’s gender transition narrative — a story “not of going from one point to another, but of wandering and in-between-ness as the place of life” (.24). Despentes claims Preciado wants “the status of permanent illegal immigrant” (ibid)

You change your name to on your identity papers as soon as your name is Paul to cross borders, you write in *Libé* that you have no intention of adopting masculinity as your new gender — you want a utopian gender. It’s as if the possible had become a prison and you the fugitive. You write

between possibilities — and by doing so, you deploy another possibility.
(Despentes 2019.24-25)

Despentes' fugitive is not content with normative, binary notions of gender. This fugitive, like Gilead's talking heads, wants more. I recognize this fugitive in historical narratives of risky MSM sex and art. Delany describes anonymous sexual MSM encounters (in 1970s Manhattan) as egalitarian, solicitous, and socially transformative, writing:

The actuality of such a situation, with thirty-five, fifty, a hundred all-but-strangers in hugely ordered, highly social, attentive, silent, and grounded in a certain care, if not community. [...] It was engrossing; it was exhausting; it was reassuring; and it was very human. (Delany 2004.226)

Despentes' fugitive embodies nonnormative yet very human aesthetic self-creation through its pursuit of more utopian imaginings. I recognize this fugitive in the PrEP/U=U landscape as a risk-taking individual seeking pleasure that is experienced as something other than in one's own body — pleasure that is exhausting, reassuring, and salvific. Despentes' fugitive and Delany's ordered, highly social and playfully attentive strangers suggest utopian ideals and ludic imaginaries that could be lifted straight from a dream state.

In the epigraph at the top of this section, Preciado thinks of dreams as "an integral part of life" (Preciado 2019a.29).

There are dreams that, because of the sensory intensity, their realism or precisely their lack of realism, deserve to be introduced into autobiography, just as much as events that were actually lived through. Life begins and ends in the unconscious; the actions we carry out while fully lucid are only little islands in an archipelago of dreams. No existence can be completely rendered in its happiness or its madness without taking into account oneiric experiences. [...] Closed and sleeping, eyes continue to see. Therefore, it is more appropriate to say that the human psyche never stops creating and dealing with reality, sometimes in dreams, sometimes in waking life. (Preciado 2019a.29)

Putting lucid to work in ways that can transcend dream and waking states, we can carry out actions while fully lucid in ways that are similar to ludic work/play, and sex is a site that, like queer space and time, evidences this transcendence.

In what ways is sex important in biopolitics and how can ludic, radical, or risky sexual ecologies help individuals break free of biopolitical constraints and achieve aesthetic self-creation? I align historical narratives of sex—particularly MSM desire and practices—with proper care of one’s body. Pastoral power—as self-creation or ipseity—can enliven individual and community health and wellbeing. Foucault’s study of the *aphrodisia* in ancient Greek culture reveals “acts, gestures, and contact that produce a certain form of pleasure” through dynamics that are “defined by the movement that linked the *aphrodisia* to the pleasure that was associate with them and to the desire to which they gave rise” (Foucault 1990b.40-42). Quantity of pleasure and the role played by men often engaged with moral valuation. “For a man,” writes Foucault, “excess and passivity were the two main forms of immorality in the practice of the *aphrodisia*” (1990b.47). In this way, agency and mindfulness in sex is important.

Greek medicine and philosophy focused the *aphrodisia* through the lens of use to be made of them of an individual wished to care properly for their body. Foucault notes, “[b]y considering [the aphrodisiac] in the aggregate, as the manifestation of a generic activity, it sought to determine the principles that would enable individuals to engage in them at the appropriate intensity and to distribute them in the right way, according to circumstances” (Foucault 1990b.136). Ancient Chinese cultural documents share similar thematic complexities with the Greeks: “fear of the irrepressible and costly act, dread of its harmful consequences for the body and health, representation of the man-woman relationship in the form of a contest,

preoccupation with obtaining descendants of good quality by means of a well-regulated sexual activity" (Foucault 1990b.137). Ancient Chinese bedroom treatises responded to these anxieties in a completely different form from classical Greece. "The dread one felt when faced with the violence of the act and the fear of losing one's semen [identified as life-force and virility in concentrate] were answered by methods of willful retention" (ibid). Willful retention is a form of anti-biopolitical self-creation.

Methods of willful retention were put to work in the early years of the AIDS crisis, through the teachings of Joseph Kramer, founder of the Body Electric School in Oakland, California.¹⁰ Through the enjoyment of raising sexual energies between MSM and gay-identified men, fear of HIV infection was, at the same time, reduced through willful bodily fluid retention. I understand this as nonteleological sexual practice. I also place this practice in context with ludic, radical, and risky sexual ecologies — practices that offer intimacy and pleasure without depending on the objectives or parameters of so-called fluid bound relations (such as two or more HIV-positive MSM who dedicate their bodies and practices of condomless sex). Fluid bound relations can also describe "fuck family" practices, where HIV-positive MSM organize a group of MSM for sexual pleasure in twos, threes, and more.

Foucault writes, "a well-managed sexual activity not only precluded any danger, it could also be result in a strengthening of one's existence and it could be a means of restoring one's youthfulness" (1990b.137). This "erotic art" (ibid), sought, with pronounced ethical concerns, to intensify the positive effects of a controlled, deliberate, multifarious, and prolonged sexual activity. Conversely, the Christian doctrine of the flesh includes closely related themes of

¹⁰ More on Kramer and his work is available at < <https://www.sexologicalbodywork.com>>.

anxiety—the involuntary violence of the sexual act, its kinship with evil, and its place in the play of life and death—all of which can be cleansed through the institution of marriage.

In short, this was a juridico-moral codification of acts, moments, and intentions that legitimated an activity that was of itself a bearer of negative values; and it inscribed it in the dual order of the ecclesiastical institution and the matrimonial institution. The time of rites and the time of legitimate procreation could absolve it of blame. (Foucault 1990b.138)

Anxiety themes of violence, expenditure, and death took shape among the Greeks within a reflection on and development of a technique of existence: “This *technē* created the possibility of forming oneself as a subject in control of his conduct; that is, [...] a skillful and prudent guide of himself, one who had a sense of the right time and the right measure” (Foucault 1990b.138-139). This *technē* constituted a privileged domain for the ethical formation of the subject:

[A] subject who ought to be distinguished by his ability to subdue the tumultuous forces that were loosed within him, to stay in control of his story of energy, and to make his life into an oeuvre that would endure beyond his own ephemeral existence. The physical regimen of pleasure and the economy it required were part of a whole art of the self. (Foucault 1990b.139)

The most important thing we learn from Foucault is, as Preciado writes, “that the living (therefore mortal) body is the central object of all politics. There are no politics that are not body politics” (Preciado 2020a). Preciado notes that, for Foucault, the body is not first a given biological organism on which power then acts. “The very task of political action is to fabricate a body,” he writes, “to put it to work, to define its modes of production and reproduction, to foreshadow the modes of discourse by which that body is fictionalized to itself until it is able to say ‘I’” (ibid). Foucault’s entire oeuvre can be understood as a map to the biopolitical and what Preciado understands as an “historical analysis of different techniques by which power manages the life and death of populations” (ibid).

Preciado's countersexual practices can be understood as "forms of sexual counterdiscipline" (Preciado 2019b.21) and he grounds these practices indirectly on Foucault,

[F]or whom the most efficient form of resistance to the disciplinary production of sexuality in our liberal societies is not the fight against prohibition (as the antirepressive sexual-liberation movements of the 1960s proposed), but rather counterproductivity—that is to say, the production of counter-protocols and forms of pleasure-knowledge as alternative to the disciplines of the modern sexual regime (Preciado 2019b.21)

Describing the sex/gender system as a "biowriting system" that writes with blood sperm, milk, water, sound, ink, oil, coil, uranium, capital, light, electricity, and radiation, they read the body as a living, constructed text where countersexuality's task is to "identity the erroneous spaces, the biotext's structural flaws (intersex bodies, transgender and transsexual bodies, queens, diesel dykes, faggots, butches, the hysterical, the horny and the frigid, the sexually disabled and the mentally ill, hermaphrodykes, etc.), and to bolster the power of deviating and drifting from the heterocentric biowriting machine" (Preciado 2019b.25). "Disabled people have the right to sexuality," writes Ibáñez-Carrasco, "and are also impacted by the erroneous notions of sexuality supported by the safer sex codex. [...] *HIV should be a disability to be amped about; instead, it is filled with shame and feelings of inadequacy*" (2019.112-113, his emphasis). In these ways, countersexual practices propose technologies of resistance or forms of sexual counter discipline.

Countersexuality is not the creation of a new nature but rather the end of nature as an order that legitimizes the subjection of some bodies to others [and] a theory of the body situated outside the polarities man/woman, masculine/feminine, heterosexuality/homosexuality, trans/cis [and] defines sexuality as technology [through consideration of] the different elements of the sex/gender system dubbed 'man,' 'woman,' 'homosexual,' heterosexual,' 'transsexual,' as well as their sexual practices and identities, to be nothing more than machines, products, instruments, gimmicks, prostheses, networks, applications, programs, connections, fluxes of energy and information, circuits and circuit breakers, switches,

traffic laws, borders, constraints, designs, logics, hard drives, formats, accidents, detritus, mechanisms, usages, and detours. (Preciado 2011.20-21)

Preciado's concepts of "countersexuality" and the "Pharmacopornographic era" inform my research in important ways that relate to risking the personal and (ludic or radical or risky) sexual ecologies.

Countersexuality is a critical analysis of gender and sexual difference, the product of the heterocentric social contract, the normative performativities of which have been inscribed on our bodies as biological truths [and] aims to replace this social contract we refer to as 'nature' with a countersexual contact [wherein] bodies recognize themselves and others not as men or women but as living bodies. (Preciado 2018.20)

The pharmacopornographic era maps the ways that necropolitical technologies of the first and second world wars have progressively become biopolitical industries for producing and controlling sexual subjectivities (Preciado 2013.26). Preciado uses examples of prosthetics development (during and after WWII), atomic technologies, and the new varieties of legal and illegal synthetic psychotropic drugs—such as bromazepam, ketamine (a.k.a. Special K), Viagra, speed, crystal meth, Prozac, ecstasy/MDMA, poppers, and heroin—as "snapshots of a postindustrial, global, and mediatic regime" of the *pharmacopornographic* (2013.33). In this trajectory, PrEP and U=U are recent markers. How can risk and countersexual methods be put to work to make gay sexual lives become genuinely queer — and resistant to the biopolitical emphasis on "normal"?

Identity (critical to biopolitics) is a consequential, central object nestled inside the entanglement of feminist theory and queer theory in relationship to sex. As Judith Butler writes,

"[S]ex" in the elided sense attributed to feminism will mean only identity and attribute, 'sex' in the explicit and lesbian/gay sense will include and supersede the feminist sense: identity, attribute sensation, pleasures,

acts, and practices. Thus “sex” in the sense deployed by lesbian and gay studies is understood to include the putative feminist binary (female or male) but also to imply the second proper object of lesbian and gay studies: “sexuality.” (Butler 1997.5)

Butler belabours the structure of this analogy because the terms it seeks to compare are not as separate as they may at first appear. “If the ‘sex’ which feminism is said to study constitutes one dimension of the multidimensional ‘sex’ that lesbian and gay research is said to study,” writes Butler, “then the implicit argument is that lesbian and gay studies does precisely what feminism is said to do but does it in a more expansive and complex way” (1997.7).

Since the first characterization (in 1870), of homosexuality as identity (versus behaviour) and as “species” (Foucault 1990a.43), the sexual practices of MSM have regularly come under scrutiny — scrutiny that criminalizes, demonizes, shames, and stigmatizes.¹¹ Under such scrutiny, MSM represent a maladjusted and risky form of socio-sexual monstrosity and deviance, always already a risky and at-risk sector of society. In relation to AIDS, these risky tropes are amplified. As John Paul Ricco writes, “through the narration of gay male lives in AIDS, gay men do not die of AIDS they are AIDS” (Ricco 2002.34).

MSM were—and still widely are—deemed unproductive in a society that is organized biopolitically and founded on productivity, especially the formalized and so-called “respectable” processes and practices of hetero-reproductive sex. The release of oral contraceptives, in 1960, signaled significant shifts in perceptions and standards of heterosexual conduct and practice in Western society. The Pill, for women, was approved by the FDA that year, and soon after, life-threatening risks associated with that high-dose medication, including blood clots and stroke,

¹¹ Carl Westphal, *Archive für Neurologie*, 1870.

became known. Despite these risks to women, the ensuing two decades witnessed a sexual explosion on social, political, and cultural levels that advanced, in great part, through the radical sexual practices of MSM. As Patrick Moore writes, “[i]n the 1970s, gay men initiated an astonishing experiment in radically restructuring existing relationships, concepts of beauty, and the use of sex as a revolutionary tool” (2004.4).

The worship of that considered ugly by the straight world was another kind of revolt against traditionalism, made all the more powerful because it was predicated on deep emotional needs rather than passing styles. (Moore 2004.26)

Moore joins other voices in my research to narrate a sexual storyline about experimental and radical MSM sex that transcends desire to become a form of performance art and, in some cases, achieve a status shared by other revolutionary social justice initiatives of that era like the anti-war, civil rights, early environmentalist, and feminism movements (Moore 2004.xxiv).

Preciado understands this sexual storyline as an *anti-repressive sexual-liberation movement* (Preciado 2019b.21). Jonathan Weinberg understands this sexual storyline as “a celebration of the possibility of creating moments of freedom and liberation in the most unlikely circumstances” (Weinberg 2019.17). Mulé seeks to resurrect such sexual storylines and radical worldviews to develop and implement a “modernized queer liberation theory” (Mulé 2019.19). Ono screams, “Open your box!” (Ono 1970). Haver invites us take risks as a distinctly queer form of harm reduction, organized through his concept of *queer’s honour*, writing,

[T]o give oneself to the risks that art, fucking, imagination, love, and thinking [...] is the place of the simultaneity of [...] anonymity, promiscuity, utter strangeness, unknowable difference, and an obscene perverse pleasure subject to no possible calculus. (Haver 1999b.xi)

These narratives are joined by commentary on the ethics of documentary bareback pornography (Morris and Paasonen), concepts of erotic subjectivity and erotic autonomy (Bailey), and gay subjectivity or “what gay men want” (Halperin) to expand and deepen knowledge debates of homosexual identity versus behaviour, and vexed (and judgmental) concepts of sexual safety. Moreover, these narratives, and the others that entangle with them in my research, create movement toward queer liberation theory and its demand for a,

[C]entralizing, salient identity, proudly being different within social and positional intersections, living their lives as they choose, contributing to society’s diversity and freeing others to do the same. (Mulé 2019.22)

I, in turn, understand this sexual storyline as an historical narrative of MSM practices that incorporate managed self risk-taking with pleasure and community building. I understand the narrative’s evolving twists and turns as HIV made itself visible in 1981, and infected and torched countless sexually active MSM in North American urban centres like a brush fire out of control. I understand—and experience—this evolving narrative of MSM sex and AIDS as a white, queer-identified artist living and aging with HIV. I understand and experience this narrative and the perceived sexual risks in the era of AIDS industry and HAART’s miraculous “Lazarus-like moments” (Andrews and Bordowitz 2014.5).

Artists Stephen Andrews and Gregg Bordowitz both confronted their mortality just as HAART—or “the cocktail,” as it became known on the street—was made available to the public in 1996. Andrews turns the temporal fuckery of the new chronic on its head: “It’s like Lazarus, who thought he was dead,” writes Andrews, “but Jesus showed up and said, ‘Come out’” (Andrews and Bordowitz 2014.23).

And he came out and was just like, what the fuck? No! I’ve been lying here rotting for four days. I am not the man I was, so why would I want to come

out and be in the world in this condition? [Before HAART] There was a real freedom in knowing that you probably wouldn't live very long. It brought with it a certain fearlessness. In the case of activism, you were threatened with stuff and you thought, "You think you can threaten me with that? I don't fucking care. I've got nothing to lose." [...] But now, you're reconciled to the fact that you don't know when you're going to kick the bucket, so you have to make all these interim plans, face the uncertainty that, frankly, everyone else's faced with. [...] You're no longer special. (Andrews 2014.23-26)

In this way, Andrews's Lazarus metaphor and HAART, as central to the new chronic, challenges Foucault's claim, "death is power's limit, that moment that escapes it" (Foucault 1990a.138).

I understand and experience evolving narratives of radical MSM sex and AIDS—and industrialization—through experiential knowledge and growth, and local and global collaborative practice that responds to HIV/AIDS, in general, and the stigmatization of radical sexual ecologies, specifically. In working through and playing with these narratives, and the specific literatures explored in my dissertation, I respond to my argument by revealing the differences in how we use sex and sexuality as identity construction versus pleasure-seeking behaviour, and difference in debates around the status of safety. These differences and debates are, in relation to HIV/AIDS, critical to understanding the productive potential in managed self risk-taking and aesthetic self-creation. One's sense of self is reorganized as sexual desire moves towards different scenes, fantasies, bodies and objects — and conditions (Paasonen 2018.3).

Haver recognizes discourses of barebacking (or bareback studies) as full of possibility, discourses that provoke "gay and lesbian studies" and "queer theory" without fear of retribution. To engage with or interrupt those inquiries (formal and informal) is, as Haver notes, "nothing so much as a forgetting and transcendence of queer pleasures, affects, and passions as they enrapture bodies irreducible to the subjectivity that is nonetheless theirs" (1999.11). In

promoting *queer's honour*, Haver attests to an absolute fidelity to the fetish, the discipline and honour of the pornographic life (Haver 1999a.12).

Should you risk this reading, exposing yourself to pornographic invention, and allowing this work finally to withdraw from interpretation and meaning into the essential anonymous singularity of the fetish and the event of art's work, you will have risked the invention, on the other side of reading, if the unimaginable extremity. (Haver 1999b.xi-xiv)

If we imagine *queer's honour* as a form of erotic transcendence, it flows from "momentary transcendence experienced in flashes of self-awareness [...] to transgression of the hegemonic rules of a particular public, to actual transformation of the standard practices of the public" (Allen 2011.96). Here, the erotic transcends associations with sex and sexuality to achieve a site of knowledge production and energy, similar to Lorde's erotic power, that pose an alternative to regimes of the state and received culture (ibid). Adam Barbu notes, "[o]verall, it seems as though Haver's work has guided us to think through forms of praxis that exist outside of traditional institutional demands of visibility" (Barbu and Ricco 2019.42). This "outside" is important in my research: I understand Allen's transformation and Barbu's forms of praxis as extension of the historical, evolving, and constellations of risky MSM sexual and creative practices, and their productive impact.

Through my exploration of biopolitics, I find a complex and contradictory knot of MSM sex, HIV/AIDS, and processes of queer world making. Morris loosens this tangle, writing, "it's possible that the men, the acts, and the recording of the acts are all unethical from a modernist, bio-political vantage point [but] It isn't that the acts and recording are unethical [...] it's that they are working within an ethic that negates modernist identity [...] these acts simply go along with the process of post-human, anti-biopolitical streaming" (Morris and Paasonen 2019.149). Queer

world making, as a process of (ludic or radical or risky) sexual ecologies, is emphasized in Morris's thinking and creative practice, a practice that runs against the grain of normative codes, laws, and imperatives. In this way, biopolitics must be reconsidered and reviewed in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of what it means to be sexual and queer in relation to risk, self-creation, safety, and harm reduction.

Biopolitics is the governmental technology of disciplinary power. This, according to Han, is "a biopolitical regime" (2017.18). I understand Foucault's disciplinary power as normative power, where the subject is subjected to sets of rules (norms, commandments, and prohibitions) and eliminates deviations and anomalies. In Han's view, both sovereign power and disciplinary power bring forth the obedient subject (2017.20). Disciplinary power, however, does not directly work the human psyche. "The *orthopaedic* technology of disciplinary power," writes Han, "is too crude to penetrate into the deeper layers of the soul—with its hidden wishes, needs and desires—and take it over" (ibid). This approach proves altogether unsuited to the neoliberal regime which, as Han writes, "exploits the psyche above all" (Han 2017.21) Biopolitics makes use of population statistics and, in that way, has little access to the psychic realm — which is crucial to sexuality, pleasure, and desire. Biopolitics can deliver, as Han notes, "no material for drawing up a *psychogram* of the population" (ibid).

Demography is not the same things as psychography. [...] Big Data provides the means for establishing not just an individual but a collective psychogram—perhaps even the psychogram of the unconscious itself. (Han 2017.21)

Biopolitics fundamentally concerns the biological and the physical. "All in all," writes Han, "it constitutes a *politics of the body* in the fullest sense" (2017.25).

But neoliberalism [...] has discovered the psyche as a productive force. This *psychic turn*—that is, the *turn to psychopolitics*—also connects with the mode of operation of contemporary capitalism. (ibid)

In the absence of material objects, immateriality—like information and programs—is foregrounded. Gilead's commercial instructs its viewers to want more, to desire pleasure in the most intimate of ways: skin on skin. In this way, sex and sexiness represent new economic resources to be increased, marketed, and exploited (Han 2017.26).

Behold profits of pleasure. Under neoliberalism, technologies of power take on subtle forms that ensure that individuals act on themselves so that power relations are interiorized, and then interpreted as freedom (Han 2017.28). Freedom to fuck without condoms. Freedom of queer sexual liberation. In place of disciplinary power, neoliberal technologies of power take on "subtle, supple and smart forms; thereby, [they] escape all visibility" (Han 2017.14). In this way, subjugated subjects are not even aware of their own subjugation: "the subject thinks itself free" (ibid). Such a dynamic seeks to activate, motivate, and optimize, as Han writes, "[i]nstead of making people *compliant*, it seeks to make them *dependent*" (Han 2017.14).

The PrEP/U=U landscape is an important site, or marker, in historical/evolving narratives of risky MSM sex and art, a marker that evidences the shift from biopolitical to neoliberal technologies of power. Biopolitical's body-oriented disciplinary power transitions to what Han describes as *psychopolitics* through "smart power" (Han 2017.13).

Smart power reads and appraises our conscious and unconscious thoughts. I place its stock in voluntary self-organization and self-optimization. As such, it has no need to overcome resistance. (Han 2017.15)

Through psychopolitics, processes and practices of *self-optimization* transform self-care into socio-industrial productivity and PrEP into a form of industrialized sexual absolution: predetermined and (officially) condoned identities and range of movement. The dynamic *continuum*, on the other hand, is an important concept to think about managed self risk-taking as a form of self-creation that is free from the judgment of (or necessity for) absolution or pre-approval.

Han centres his analysis on Holzer's creative text-work "Protect Me From What I Want." This dynamic example of art and artistic practice (originally produced in the 1983 as part of her text-based *Survival* series, called *truisms*, that respond to AIDS and life's daily risks) in response to AIDS) takes risks by making the public, who encounter the truism in unexpected public spaces, spaces where people normally congregate, think about the message and how it might connect to their personal lives and desires — particularly at a time fraught with pre-treatment AIDS. Holzer's text-work continues to affect viewers/readers with its capacity to question their desire(s), whether they are sexual, material, or financial.

In his interrogation of biopolitics, neoliberalism, and smart power, Han notes, "[t]oday, power is assuming increasingly permissive forms. In its permissivity—indeed, in its friendliness—power is shedding its negativity and presenting itself as freedom" (2017.13-14). Han's permissivity underscores Gilead's insistence that we *want more*. Like Holzer's *truism*, Gilead—through PrEP—allegedly protects users from what they want, that is, so-called "unprotected" sex in the material (not chemical) sense. Gilead gives permission to explore more intimate, meaningful forms of sexual contact — permission that always already exists in the concept of the dynamic continuum of risk and historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and art. What PrEP

creates, then, is a blanket acceptance of so-called risk rather than a mandate for judgment-free pleasure.

Dependence is critical to successful navigation of the PrEP/U=U landscape through rigorous compliance to medication. “Power that is smart and friendly does not operate frontally,” writes Han (ibid).

It says ‘yes’ more often than ‘no’; it operates seductively, not repressively. It seeks to call forth positive emotions and exploits them. It *leads astray* instead of erecting obstacles. [...] Smart power cosies up to the psyche rather than disciplining it through coercion or prohibitions. It does not impose silence. [...] Smart power [...] stimulates and seduces [and] reads and appraises out conscious and unconscious thoughts. It places its stock in voluntary self-organization and self-optimization [both of which can be understood as parallel to my suggestion of voluntary self risk-taking]. The capitalism of *Like* [as in the “like” button of digital social networking] should come with a warning label: *Protect me from what I want*. (Han 2017.14-15)

For Han, the neoliberal regime seems like a ‘soul’ (ibid). “As such,” writes Han, “*psychopolitics* is its own form of government” (ibid). Self-creation according to someone else’s codes and rules has nothing to do with the self. Industrial processes of self-optimization and dependence form a kind of gentrification that produces a community of banality and compliance.

In this emerging landscape of psychopolitics, pleasure, desire, self-optimization, and voluntary and managed self risk-taking, it is important to disrupt LGBTQI theories and actions that are increasingly moving (and reshaping) in assimilationist directions — from the most banal expressions such as same sex marriage, the gentrification of queer neighbourhoods (and, in turn, queer minds and imaginations), to outright homogeneity in cultural production including queer DJ playlists and photography practices, and the internal policing and shaming of so-called risky sexual practices in LGBTQI communities. Mulé describes the ways that queer activists take up

'queer' as a centralizing, salient identity, where "proudly being different within social and positional intersections, living their lives as they choose, contributing to society's diversity and freeing others to do the same" (Mulé 2019.22).

In essence, this is a form of grassroots, progressive, radical, applicable queer liberationism [that] also has the ability to contribute to sexual citizenry by expanding its parameters. An attempt to stake out ones place in society, based upon a valued and acknowledged sexual identity, is a means of establishing sexual citizenship. (Mulé 2019.22-23)

The notion of "grassroots" reflects on the work done by MSM who, in the face of pre-treatment AIDS, experimented with different sexual approaches within community — approaches that would, in time, constitute safer sex programs and protocol.

"Unsafe sex," writes Halperin, "is a way of living at the edges of cognition" (2007.46).

It is also a kind of speculative ethical experimental, a means of playing with time that consists in putting your life at risk in the moment, in ways that may not make sense to you then and there, but that allow you to discover, retrospectively, what exactly matters to you, and why. (Halperin 2007.46)

Keeping tempo with Halperin, Paul Willis notes, "[t]he usual assumption of the flow of the self from the past to the future is stopped: the dialect of time is broken" (1977.34). In these ways, so-called unsafe (or unprotected) sex defies the disciplinary logic of moral rationality itself, which requires us to evaluate our actions by orienting them towards a future. In short, this may be a large part of condomless sex's transgressive appeal (Halperin 2007.46).

While the MSM and gay-identified communities have arrived at their present state—a dissociated form of assimilationism that excludes all except those leading the most heteronormative of lives—we should not mistake visibility for civil rights (Moore 2014.xxvii). Assimilation must not be confused with safety. The evolution of safer sex practices indicates

that risk and the spectrum of safety are not opposites or alternatives, and much of what now qualifies as *safe sex* is the result of gay men's spontaneous improvisations with varying degrees of risk, what might be described as *negotiated safety* (Halperin 2007.19). MSM and lesbian women have continued to define and redefine, as Halperin writes, "the limits of safety through an ongoing history of sexual experimentation and mutual consultation, and who have thereby produced, over time, workable compromises and pragmatic solutions that balance safety and risk in proportions that have turned out to be both acceptable to a majority of gay men and successful in limiting the transmission of HIV" (Halperin 2007.19).

Mechanisms—or technologies—of selective, calculated, and voluntary risk-taking have helped reduce the harmful effect of a utopian rhetoric that insists we can all end AIDS if everyone adhered to the safer sex codex, that is, use a condom every time. "Safer sex discourse," writes Haver, "has become an essential part of an entire scientific medical technology of social control such that all illness, disability, and death itself have become essentially moral failings rather than misfortunes" (1999b.9). Twenty years later, the moral failings that Haver identifies are present in the PrEP/U=U universe. Material condom versus chemical condom: moral ethics and misguided public health strategies ignore pleasure over epidemiological data. Make pleasure, not pathology.

Ethics

Barebackers' abandonment of condoms is motivated not only by a lust for enhanced physical sensation but also by a desire for certain emotional sensations, particularly the symbolic significance attached to experiences of vulnerability or risk. Rather than mindless fucking, bareback sex is an activity deeply invested with meaning. — Tim Dean (2009.45).

In this section, I examine the ethical frameworks of risk, MSM sex, and historical/evolving narratives of risk in relation to AIDS as sites of Dean's *activity deeply invested with meaning*. Risky artistic responses to AIDS and MSM sex are, too, deeply invested with meanings that create movement and social change. I explore the ways that AIDS art is ludic—playful and serious—in the ways it can challenge ethics. I also explore ethical systems in relation to HIV/AIDS and its risky representations, (biomedical, biopolitical, and sexual) citizenship, ethopolitics, HIV criminalization, and the utopian promise of pornography that battles risky representations of MSM sex and AIDS. Throughout, I remind myself of a relative truth: there are outstanding, uninterrupted conservative perspectives that govern institutional ethics and ethical guidelines. These conservative hauntings contain and maintain the kind of moral values that underwrite the industrial safeguards—and production and control mechanisms—in PrEP. These conservative evocations are gentrification, the industrialization of scholarship.

Moralizing, homophobic social orders and industrial and gentrifying mitigations of risk are principal targets of this project. Philosophical and somatic—not moral—ethics direct my research. Human beings in contemporary Western culture are, as Rose writes, “increasingly coming to understand themselves in somatic terms” (2007.254).

[C]orporeality has become one of the most important sites for ethical judgments and techniques [regarding] the relative and comparative quality of life of differently composed human beings and of different ways

of being human. [...] Our biological life itself has entered the domain of decision and choice; these questions of judgment have become inescapable. This is what it means to live in an age of biological citizenship, of 'somatic ethics,' and of vital politics. (2007.254)

Living with HIV elevates the concept of biological citizenship and somatic ethics; decision and choice (and disclosure) become daily activities, regardless of the harmful reminders they can bring. Rose deliberates on the importance of somatic identity, especially for people marginalized through disability, chronic illness, and class. Understanding one's own HIV-positive body and its possibilities (outside of moral ethical judgment) forms a lifelong learning path to self-creation. I connect Rose's concept of biological life and citizenship with notions of sexual citizenry in Mulé's queer liberation theory.

Queer liberation has the ability to contribute to sexual citizenry by expanding its parameters (Mulé 2019.23). As Mulé writes:

Claims for citizenship are a pursuit of belonging, a means of demarcating a legitimate place in society. For queer communities, such claims represent a transition from a private (closeted) existence, to one that is more public and challenges society to be more inclusive, while simultaneously protecting one's private life. (ibid)

I imagine a legitimate and ethical place in society for MSM who pursue (ludic or radical or risky) sexual ecologies, for artists who risk the personal to produce creative, meaningful materialities that, in turn, help society advance on issues of desire and difference, and HIV-positive people who experience harm through risky representations of HIV/AIDS. I understand self risk-taking as a form of foregrounding decision and choice, and the novel forms of life politics that AIDS can reveal as a form of self-creation.

In the era of HIV (and widespread sexual) criminalization, older identity markers—sexual orientation, gender, race, sexual history, nationality—are augmented by renewals of stigma that

continue to equate HIV infection with contagion and antisocial intentions. These infections and intentions, in turn, forge an “explicit distinction between responsible and irresponsible forms of sexual citizenship” (Tomso 2017.359). These markers perpetuate risky representations of HIV/AIDS specifically and MSM sex in general. Gender and sex are always already subjected to regulatory (biopolitical) systems organized around the presumption of heteronormativity. HIV prevention activists have, as Race writes, “found it necessary to risk a practical distinction between normative morality and the embodied ethics of HIV prevention” (2007.100).

[A] tension between normative morality and an ethic of care grounded in embodied practice is a defining feature of HIV politics, and those who are interested in responding effectively to the epidemic must remain alive to the ways in which the propagation of certain normative ideals compromises the ability to engage effectively. (ibid)

Emergent homonormativity—or *homonational citizenship*—may support forms of heteronormativity and the citizenship, class, race, and privilege they require and maintain (Puar 2007.9). As Jasbir K. Puar writes, “[h]omonormativity can be read as a formation complicit with and invited into the biopolitical valorization of life in its inhabitation and reproduction of heteronormative norms” (Puar 2007.9). Same-sex marriage and its common linkages to monogamy, gentrification, and other forms of community, political, and social homogeneity and conformity is one exemplification of homonormativity. Lisa Duggan understands homonormativity in relation to the sexual politics of neoliberalism and an invocation of a “phantom mainstream public of ‘conventional’ gays who represent [a] responsible centre” (Duggan 2002.179). “[H]omonormativity,” she writes, “is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay

culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (ibid). This creates obstacles to the forms of aesthetic self-creation that my dissertation seeks to achieve.

Homonormativity, when entangled with nationalism, produces homonationalism — a complex knot and "manifold trajectories of racialization and un-nationalization of sexual others" that foster violence toward and privatization of sexuality (Puar 2007.10). "The spectral resistances to gay marriage, gay adoptive and parental rights, 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policies [...] entail that the protection of life granted through national belonging is a precarious invitation a best," writes Puar (ibid). The "tight inclusiveness" (ibid) of homonormativity and homonationalism are implicit in industrial AIDS interventions through systems of access and privilege that come with claims of exceptionalism (as in the USA) and economic resources — resources that are often declined to some individuals due to "the undesirability of their race, ethnicity, religion, class, national origin, age, or bodily ability" (ibid).

[C]laims to exceptionalism are loaded with unexamined discourses about race, sexuality, gender, and class [and] rely on the erasure of these very modalities in order to function: these elisions are, in effect, the ammunition with which the exception, necessary to guard the properties of life, becomes the norm, and the exceptional, the subjects upon whom this task is bestowed, becomes the normal. (Puar 2007.10).

I use homonormativity and homonationalism as a lens to examine AIDS, its intersections and risky representations. This examination connects the assimilation and privatization of queer and MSM sexualities to biopolitical notions (and mechanisms) of normativity, and underscores processes of gentrification (as a trope of exceptionalism and exclusivity). Homonormativity and homonationalism are forms of group think (and action) that prohibit queer self-creation and sexual citizenship as expressions of and entitlements to difference.

Puar troubles this prohibition, writing, “it is certainly the case that within a national as well as a transnational frame, some queers are better than others” (2007.48). Puar’s work collectively underscores heteronormativity as “a prerequisite for both legal and cultural citizenship [and some of it fails] to theorize the class-, race-, and gender-specific dimension of this heteronormativity” (ibid). This prerequisite assumes an “uninterrogated positioning of white racial privilege and a single, rather than intersectional, axis of identity” (ibid). Activist groups, like the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Queer Nation (a more confrontational group of younger activists that emerged from ACT UP in 1990) worked on queering the nation, so to speak. Puar describes these actions as “politically salient dialogue regarding reproduction of racial and national lineages and norms, nationalizing queerness has primarily served to reiterate discourses of American sexual exceptionalism” (Puar 2007.48-49). Nationhood, queerness, and modern sexual identities are, Puar reminds us, constructed through histories of colonialism, empire, and racialization. “[T]he nation is founded on the (homo)sexual other,” writes Puar (2007.49). From this crossroads of nation formation and sexual and racialized identities, Puar argues that homosexual desires and their redirection are foundational to the project of nationalism, as is the strict policing of the homo-hetero binary. “Nations are heteronormative because of, rather than despite, homosexuality,” writes Puar (ibid). Queer bodies may be invalidated, yet there is space, as Puar notes, “for the absorption and management of homosexuality—temporally, historically, and spatially specific—when advantageous for the nation” (Puar 2007.50). This management is compartmentalized in order to discipline and normalize queer bodies.

Homonationalism, according to Puar, bolsters nations by reiterating heterosexuality as the norm. “[T]he bid for gay marriage accords an ‘equal but different status’ through the notion of monogamy and ‘fosters nationalist homosexual positionalities indebted to liberalism’ (Puar 2007.51). Importantly, homonationalism enables transnational discourses of sexual exceptionalism in relation to “perversely racialized bodies of pathologized nationalities” (ibid).

Sexual citizenship perspectives break with philosophical considerations and political histories of citizenship, that is, the way that authorities think about some people as potential citizens. How can art and artistic practice process issues of citizenship? Andrews activates the term “citizen,” writing, “that’s how I’ve begun describing myself, rather than activist. I’m exercising my rights as a citizen, and I’m acknowledging my responsibilities as a citizen. I guess there’s an ethics that’s involved with that” (Andrews & Bordowitz 2014.40). Drawing the biological into the conversation shapes these possibilities through conceptions of what it means to be a citizen versus art and artistic practice that responds to risky and sexy and HIV-positive citizenships. Underpinned distinctions between actual, potential, troublesome, and impossible citizens tangle with the ways that many citizenship projects were (and are) framed in biological terms (Rose 2007.132). These frames include race, bloodlines, stock, intelligence, and privilege.

What do historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and art, and constellation of risky practices look, sound, and feel like, as a citizenship project that spans four decades? Links between biology, human worth, HIV/AIDS, and queerness challenge different ideas about the biological responsibilities of citizenship as they are embodied in contemporary norms of health, practices of health education, and HIV/AIDS prevention methods — and are bound up with contemporary transnational practices of human rights (Rose 2007. 133). *The risk to live. The right*

to love. Moore insists that the sexual experimentation of MSM in the 1960s and 1970s must be viewed in terms of the “more radical elements of that era’s antiwar, civil rights, and feminist movements—as part of a wide spectrum of sometimes threatening but historically important creative actions toward social change” (Moore 2004.xxiv). This is important in imagining present/future sexual ecologies and the novel relations, desires, and affect they encourage. From these crossroads, citizenship practices and projects can be understood through corporeality and somatic terms in sexualized constructions of identity: the languages as aspirations of citizenship have shaped the ways that individuals understand and relate to themselves, and relate to others through biological senses of identification and affiliation (Rose 2007.133). Historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and art, and the continuum of risk (as a lens to understand these narratives) fully realize these senses of identification.

Biological citizenship can be both individualizing and collectivizing. I witness this, over and over, in practices of risking the personal, and art and artistic practice that use risk. As Rose writes, “[i]ndividuals shape their relationships with themselves in terms of their somatic individuality [and] a more contemporary ‘regime of the self’” (Rose 2007.134). The HIV-positive regime of the self is a somatic singularity relating to other singularities and the environment. What does HIV-positive citizenship look, sound, and feel like? As a form of organizing around the commonality of a shared somatic status, biological and sexual citizenships collectivize and connect to new ethical technologies that assemble around corporeal vulnerability, biological risk, and susceptibility (Rose 2007.134). Individually and collectively, the time has come to recognize barebackers and hard drug-users as “resilient and sexual and cultural pioneers that effect cultural resistance, take on the uncertainty of life and the ambiguity of public spaces, and

perform radical disability” (Ibáñez-Carrasco 2019.118). Rose, however, finds the language of pioneering implies “too much heroic struggle,” when many of those engaged in issues of HIV/AIDS with their bodies, with their choices, do so through “small-scale achievements in the everyday realities of their lives” (Rose 2007.146). While some people may view technologies of biomedical, biological, sexual citizenship as forms of *narcissistic self-absorption* (Rose 2007.146), such citizenry reveals “admirable ethical seriousness” (ibid) and a sense of self-determination against marginalizing and stigmatizing odds. As Rose writes,

[T]he new biomedical communities forming on the Web and outside it can be seen as moral pioneers—or perhaps ‘ethical pioneers’—of a new kind of biomedical citizenship. They are pioneering of a new informed ethics of the self—a set of techniques for managing everyday life in relation to a condition, and in relation to expert knowledge. (ibid)

In my research, expert knowledge includes experiential knowledge. This is where I insert Foucault’s concept of pastoral power to explorations of ethics in the era of neoliberalism. The social agenda of neoliberal ideology is, as Mulé writes, “to erase any notion of constituency, substituting it with a privatized and individualized ‘citizen’ [alongside refusals] to recognize that people might have different and unequal needs” (Mulé 2019.26).

Systemically, neoliberalism has had debilitating effects on community and citizenship. A culture of apathetic consumerism has been created, marginalizing discourse that includes an ideal of ‘commons’ or ‘the common good.’ Hence, neoliberalism has a governing rationality that mediates the construction of the very normativity queer liberationists oppose. The desire for sexual and gender freedom, allowing space for diversity and fluid expression, is one that can be applied to all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. This is at the core of what the queer liberation movement can contribute to sexual citizenship. (ibid)

Mulé’s *very normativity* and his allowance of *space for diversity and fluid expression* form critical layers in (ludic or radical or risky) sexual ecologies. Sexual citizenship is not just a (biopolitical)

form of aesthetic self-creation, it can resist neoliberal technologies of power — even as neoliberalism’s privatizing agenda has downsized an already minimalized welfare state that, in turn, promotes heterosexual marriage as a more stable kinship configuration. “[T]here are obvious economic benefits for the state in pushing heterosexual marriage,” writes Puar. This, of course, implicates homonormativity through practices of same sex marriage, and moralizing arguments that also highlight problematic or failed cultural and racial anomalies and attributes. Duggan locates homonormativity as a “new neo-liberal sexual politics [that depends on] the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption [...] a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative forms but upholds and sustains them” (Duggan 2002.179). In these ways, homonormativity is also a form of muting of historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and art, and the continuum of risky practices that chronicle them.

In biopolitical processes of subjectification and, in particular, ethopolitics (Rose 2007.22), risk and risk-taking indicates “risk thinking” (Rose 2007.70): ways of thinking and acting that involve calculations about probable futures followed by interventions into the present in order to control that potential future. Through “ethopolitics,” Rose refers to “attempts to shape the conduct of human beings by acting upon their sentiments, beliefs, and values—in short, by acting on ethics” (Rose 2007.27). Ethopolitics is especially suited to issues of HIV/AIDS and its intersection and risky presentations, present/future sexual ecologies, and the “ethos of human existence—the sentiments, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of persons, groups, or institutions” (Rose 2007.27). Ethopolitics is concerned with technologies of the self that humans use to judge and act upon themselves to improve themselves (ibid). In relation to HIV-positive MSM who

participate in sexual community through raw sex practices, ethopolitics and the improvement of the self focuses on pleasure and the harm reduction possibilities in experiencing sex that is free from the condom's (symbolic) barrier. This barrier inhibits physical and emotional connections with men, where semen exchange satisfies a deep psychosocial desire for recognition and affirmation from other MSM (Bailey 2016.245). Specifically, ethopolitics oversees life-style and community concerns, and coalesces around a kind of vitalism, including "quality of life" and "the right to choose," which is implicit in negotiating raw sex (Rose 2007.27). Thus, ethopolitics reveals the politics of how we can—and should—conduct ourselves appropriately in relation to ourselves, desires that preclude harm to others, and with responsibility toward futures where sex is not regulated by moral compasses. In the PrEP/U=U landscape, sexual ecologies productively risk the personal through intimate anonymous contact, meaningful social connections, and new expressions of relation, desire, and affect that mirror ethopolitical conduct and responsibility.

In Canada, the bio-moral quality (and character) of public health policy in relation HIV is manifest in outdated safer sex guidelines, the inability to conceptualize HIV as an episodic disability, an ineffectiveness to keep pace with sexual/cultural conversations and practices of MSM, timid responses to HIV criminalization, and an inability to connect physical (and virtual) spaces with public health policies (Ibáñez-Carrasco 2019.118).¹² Risky thinking has been central to biopolitics and, as Rose writes, "[d]emands for collective measures of biopolitical risk

¹² The Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE) describes HIV as an episodic illness that is chronic and manageable. The organization's website notes, "[i]f disabilities related to HIV do occur, they are mostly episodic, meaning that people with HIV may experience periods of wellness and periods of illness. These episodes of illness may occur on a daily basis or over extended periods of time, such as an HIV-related infection that results in hospitalization" (CATIE 2018).

management, far from lessening, are proliferating and globalizing” (Rose 2007.71). Strategies aimed at reducing the probability of unexpected events across a population, like targeting risky practices and locales such as condomless sex in MSM communities while turning a blind eye to similar practices in straight sectors rather than risky or at risk individuals—are spreading to many other kinds of unwanted events, notably crime control like HIV criminalization (Rose 2007.71). In this way, frameworks of ethics, risk thinking, management, and profiling use probabilistic and epidemiological knowledge to identify factors associated with higher risks of particular forms of pathology — pathologies that isolate and demonize MSM sex, fly in the face of PrEP, and, more importantly, the findings of U=U.

In advanced (neo)liberal democracies, individuals are encouraged to think about themselves as actively shaping their life course through acts of choice in the name of a better future and technologies of self-care and self-optimization. In relationship to HIV/AIDS and practices of condomless sex in the PrEP/U=U landscape, an ethic organized around the ideals of health and life can produce anxiety and fear about the future. This landscape can frequently generate a moral economy in which ignorance, resignation and hopelessness is, as Rose notes, “deprecated.” This deprecation creates, in turn, a moral economy of hope (2007.27). How does this relate to HIV/AIDS and its intersectionalities and (risky) representations? Rose suggests,

[T]his moral economy of hope is also an economy in the more traditional sense, for the hope for the innovation that will treat or cure stimulates the circuits of investment. Hence the ethos of hope links together many different actors—of actual or potential sufferers for a cure, of scientists and researchers for a breakthrough that will make their name and advance their career, of doctors and health care professionals for a therapy that will heal treat their patients [as in anti-retroviral treatment for people living with HIV/AIDS, and PrEP for HIV-negative individuals], of biotech companies for a product that will generate profit, of governments for industrial and commercial developments that will generate

employment and stimulate economic activity and international competitiveness. (Rose 2007.27)

Living with HIV/AIDS is a complex and contradictory experience. Aging with HIV/AIDS expands those complexities and contradictions, affecting vectors of sexual practice, desire, comorbidity (the combination of HIV with other health complications), politics of risk management, struggles with economic and financial survival, homelessness, and uncertainty. “The normalization of HIV,” writes Ibáñez-Carrasco, “has put the last nail on the coffin of oblivion of the 1980s and 1990s generation. We are still sick but we look cured” (2019.113).

Public health has done nothing but cosset gay men into another gay fantasy of wellness. Continued implementation of public health programs with an ahistorical safer sex codex, in conjunction with the lack of clarity of HIV as an episodic disability, contributes to the stigmatization of HIV and the uncertainty that gay men living with HIV feel about the future of being HIV-positive. [...] Making a world that is, arguably, risky and uncertain for most, I suggest that the safer sex spectre especially contributes to the uncertainty of poz queers. (Ibáñez-Carrasco 2019.113.114)

Crises of meaning commonly emerge from these complex and contradictory crossroads of ethics, sexual citizenship, and self-creation.

Threads of unending crisis and uncertainty hold double meaning: a) they connect to neoliberalism (and its roots in capitalism) where crisis is a necessary fuel for movement and “immunology starts to turn a profit” (Cohen 2009, 269); and, b) a preposterously high number of people in the general population are walking around with serious health challenges, like cancer and HIV/AIDS, that generate, by way of disease treatment, a certain *crisis of meaning* (Cazdyn 2012, 18). The meaning(s) of “crisis” can be interrogated in context with the new chronic, HIV/AIDS, and other chronic health conditions—like cancer—through the lens of “slow death” (Berlant 2007). Laurent Berlant notes, “[o]ften when scholars and activists apprehend the

phenomenon of slow death in long-term conditions of privation they choose to misrepresent the duration and scale of the situation by calling a crisis that which is a fact of life and has been a defining fact of life for a given population that lives it as a fact in ordinary time" (Berlant 2007.60). Through "slow death," Berlant argues "agency can be an activity of maintenance, not making; fantasy, without grandiosity' sentience, without full intentionality; inconsistency, without shattering; embodying, alongside embodiment" (Berlant 2007.759). "Slow death," Berlant writes, "prosper not in traumatic events [...] but in temporal environments whose qualities and whose contours in time and space are often identified with the presentness of ordinariness itself" (ibid). Slow death occurs in the everyday, in historical narratives of MSM sex and art, in the risky practices that represent the everyday activities of cruising in public spaces, in gay bathhouse "afternooners" (an MSM-specific expression for midday sexual encounters), and in the new chronic condition that unfolds for HIV-positive people who achieve U=U. The pandemic concept is not neutral. "[I]t's inevitably part of an argument about classification, causality, responsibility, degeneracy, and the imaginable and pragmatic logics of cure" (Berlant 2007.673).

As disease management increasingly assumes fact-of-life positions in "ordinary time," shifting concepts of "epidemic" and "endemic" also come under investigation (Berlant 2007; Foucault 2003b, 2007, 2008). By turning ordinary life into "crisis ordinariness, social justice activists [and artists] engage in the actuarial imaginary of biopolitics" (Berlant 2007, 761). Moreover, the recent rise of molecular HIV surveillance, and the implications on HIV/AIDS in relationship to consent and criminalization, produces further—noisy—layers to these crises.¹³

¹³ Molecular HIV surveillance uses data collected during routine testing for drug resistance that people who test

In closing this section, I examine ethics in relation to MSM pornography produced by Treasure Island Media (TIM), a porn hub that specializes in condomless sex, non-stereotypical porn bodies, and many MSM sexual fringe groups. “The utopian promise of porn,” write Morris and Paasonen, “is one of carnal intensity, sexual plenitude, and pleasure” (Morris and Paasonen 2014.215). Featuring predominantly HIV-positive men who practice barebacking in their personal lives as “performers,” videos from the TIM studios include sexual interactions that often unfold in two ways: 1) improvised and, 2) based on the fantasies of practices of the participating men, individuals who “share their life, and sex, with a virus” (Morris and Paasonen 2019.147). TIM has experienced its fair share of controversy and condemnation, especially in LGBTQI communities, the least of which is over the graphic representation of condomless anal sex.¹⁴

In the epigraph that opens this section, Dean locates bareback sex as an activity that is deeply invested with meaning. “Behind the characterization of unprotected anal sex as unlimited intimacy,” writes Dean, “there is a distinct account of relationality, of what it means

HIV-positive may undergo when entering care. As Alexander McClelland, Adrian Gupta, and Marilou Gagnon write, “Genotypic testing is considered a standard part of clinical care in many high-income countries and is initiated to help ensure the person’s virus is not resistant to the chosen antiretroviral medication. [...] While the CDC cautions: ‘Molecular analysis examines the genetics of the virus, not the person’ (CDC 2018) it is clear that the intervention is seeking certain kinds of persons, and those who are participating in certain kinds of activities. Indeed, focusing on molecules allows for a surveillance attuned toward the vectors of disease evacuated from the complexity presented by intervening in complex social relations. [...] Activists living with HIV have been concerned about the human rights and privacy implications of this public health turn from people to molecules. Specifically, the debates have centered on the use of molecular surveillance technologies by the US and Canada which are also leaders in the world for criminalizing HIV exposure, transmission and non-disclosure. As well, both countries have pervasive criminalization regimes marked by the over policing of people who use drugs, sex workers and those with precarious migration status. Following the leadership of activists, as social scientists, we identify a range of ethical concerns, including potential violations to privacy and consent in a context where individuals’ health data are being repurposed for use in surveillance which disproportionately targets marginalized people already experiencing over-policing and criminalization” (2019.1-3).

¹⁴ TIM has, as Paasonen writes, “remained controversial by countering the imperative of safe sex in gay porn established since the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic and by starring HIV-positive performers in intense gang bangs that feature abundant exchanges of semen. [...] Tim Dean identifies it as a means of undoing the HIV closet” (2014.215-216).

to be in contact with other human beings. The term intimacy sometimes stands as a euphemism for fucking, but it also signals the emotional experiences that accompany sex" (Dean 2009.45).

"'[U]nsafe sex' is not only insane," insists Morris, "it is also essential" (Dean 2009.56). In interview with Paasonen, Morris outlines the ethical considerations in TIM productions. "For his part," writes Paasonen, "Morris defines his ethics as 'based in the admixture of a loopy but real American optimism and a nearly insane degree of queer rage' in the context of heteronormative culture where queer identities and sexual practices have become entangled with the virus" (Morris and Paasonen 2019.146). In a world defined, ruled, and represented by heterosexuality, Morris "the queer isn't human. The life of a queer is a composite, synthetic experience, something necessarily non-native and never belonging. [...] Queer sex is the primal experience from which identities develop. I suck dick, therefore I am. (ibid)

Morris believes the condition of queerness requires a "perfectly unreasonable" return from within the "framing of life as being hetero-based," and a critical understanding of and resistance to biopolitics (ibid).

In a world that tells you that you are sick, dying, dead, how unreasonable is it to state with perfect assuredness that, far from being ancillary or mal/conceived, we are the centre of the world, our promiscuousness and limitless sexual pleasure an endlessly creative and pure mine from which all else is derived and conditional. (ibid)

Morris's unreasonable queer ethics situates sex front and centre. "[S]ex not only matters, but is primary, it is worth taking risks for" (Morris and Paasonen 2019.147). Ethics in the AIDS era are, for Morris, best represented through the specificities of the pornography he has produced. "They are precise things for me," writes Morris (ibid). "[W]hen I say that porn is precise, the precision is in the sex. And if I have a feeling of behaving ethically or unethically, it's relative to

the clarity with which the sex and the specific sexual improvisations of the men are presented” (ibid). For him, the gravity of recorded sex “overwhelms ethics” (ibid).

[W]hen sex and porn have been impacted by a calamity such as the HIV epidemic, one has to think about the continuity of sexuality, queerness, and humanness. [...] I would say that male pornography secondarily humbles the intellect but primarily opens a space within which queer identity can recognize and remember itself. (Morris and Paasonen 2019.148)

In order to remember the male sexual language of the body, Morris insists “everything that threatens the body has to be incorporated, digested, and assimilated into the sex. To say that my porn is unethical means that what men are is unethical” (Morris and Paasonen 2019.149).

TIM’s raunchy stamp does not ignore an ethics of sex in the era of AIDS industry. Rather, it celebrates the ethical revolution that constellations of risk celebrate and, in doing so, represents the kind of aesthetic self-creation that is at the heart of my work. Morris encourages meaningful, ethical dialogue about what sex means when men living with HIV seek pleasure through fucking with the new chronic, and relations with death in the PrEP/U=U landscape. Moreover, TIM productions represent the emergence of risky narratives that can offer insights to HIV-positive MSM and others who wish to explore ludic or radical or risky sexual ecologies. Morris’s work offers critical insights and ways to challenge risky representations of AIDS. Morris upends moral ethical frameworks by allowing for the differential worth of different forms of life and sexual citizenship.

Risking the Personal

[P]hilosophy takes risks: thinking is always a decision which supports independent points of view. The desire of philosophy thus has four dimensions: revolt, logic, universality and risk. —Alain Badiou (*Infinite Thought*, 2004.40)

Putting yourself at risk, you interrupt the normal course of your life, resist its established order of meaning, and thereby perform an immanent critique of its priorities. Risk is a tactic for testing which of your values ultimately count.
—David M. Halperin (2007.46-47)

Art and artistic practice can use risk in personal, productive ways even when harm generates a gravitational pull. In this section, I explore the ways that risking the personal and new sexual ecologies can open new ways to think and experience lives of pleasure that resist hegemonic and homophobic norms and operations. This section contributes to my dissertation as a focused examination of risk in personal contexts, literatures, MSM sexual practices, and art and artistic practice.

In this section, I explore the Combahee River Collective's statement: *the personal is political*; ambivalence surrounding risky, dangerous, and unsettling life choices and actions (Anzaldúa); the sexual and spiritual logic of barebacking (Dustan); risky public feelings (Cvetkovich); concepts of atavistic knowledge in relation to outlaw sex, outlaw drugs, and outlaw politics (Seitler) that persist in the face of AIDS; and the potential personal gains of speaking out about personal risk (Lorde). I examine specific examples where sex and aesthetic self-creation entwine — through the work of Delany (and his understanding of anonymous MSM sex as meaningful social contact), Lorde (and her tropes of silence and erotic power), Moore's insistence that radical MSM sex in 1970s is a vital location of social justice, and Weinberg's survey of MSM cruising on the west side piers of Manhattan and his queer understandings of Lorde's uses of the erotic. In these narrative settings, constellations of risk in MSM sex and ludic art, and

artistic practice is a form of leitmotif. As Paasonen writes, “[p]lay remains the chosen term in diverse sexual cultures to describe how scenes come about, how they evolve and how they are lived out, from sex parties to variations of bondage, age play, pony-play, pup-play or ‘party and play’ [PNP] sessions combining sex and recreational drug use” (Paasonen 2018.1). The concepts of play and playfulness have emerged with some regularity in feminist and queer studies of sexuality but, as Paasonen notes, “[t]hey have not, however, been exhaustively applied in theorizing the affective capacities and shifting carnal horizons of possibility that sexual acts, desires and pleasures involve” (Paasonen 2018.8).

“Your silence will not protect you,” writes Lorde (Lorde 2007.41). In making the private public, we can set ourselves free and, at the same time, free those individuals who—in reading and responding to personal narratives—can relate. In making the private public and its conceptual expansion to politicization through the Combahee River Collective Statement that *the personal is political*, I can better understand the ways that sexually active MSM have experienced historical narratives of sex and AIDS, and their potential experiences in the PrEP/U=U universe that are both cultural and political (Taylor 2017.15-27).¹⁵ The Combahee River Collective’s 1977 statement reads, “[a] political contribution which we feel we have already made is the expansion of the feminist principle that the personal is political” (Taylor 2017.20). In

¹⁵ The Combahee River Collective (CRC) is a group of black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974 and are involved in the process of defining and clarifying its politics while, at the same time, doing political work within its own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements (from “Combahee River Collective Statement,” in Taylor 2017-15). The collective is actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and the development of integrated analysis and practice based on the fact that major systems of oppression are interlocking (ibid). The collective’s statement positions Black Feminist presence as evolving “most obviously in connection with the second wave of the American women’s movement beginning in the late 1960s [and] Black feminist politics also have an obvious connection to movements for Black liberation, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s” (Taylor 2017.16-17). The CRC’s forward-thinkings include the first text where the term “identity politics” is used (Taylor 2017.8).

relation to neoliberalism, HIV/AIDS, and the PrEP/U=U universe, I transform *the personal is political* into *the personal is psychopolitical* (qua Han).

In what ways is risking the personal worth the risk or is it a form of self-traumatization? “Take the trouble to administer the necessary doses of knowledge to yourself,” notes Preciado, “as many as your taste for risk allows you” (2019.39). Free writing, lack of self-censorship, recalling and reimagining concrete memories—images, places, sensations and sensualities, sounds, movements, vibrations, the receptive moment of infection, the receptive moment of positive test results—can reveal otherwise possibilities. Risky narrative sounds, visuals, and writings about sexual interaction can stimulate sexual health dialogue. Moreover, activating new sexual ecologies as grist for creative processing and material production can support sexual citizenship efforts and fuel social justice movement and change. Some people, including interviewees, debate these aspects and suggest that (repeated) risking the personal can result in self-traumatization. To interrogate this debate, I am going to look at, immerse in, and listen to cultures of eros, desire, and the sexual, and use “repetition as desire creation” (Fink 2005.23).

In the first of two epigraphs that head this section, Alain Badiou writes, “philosophy takes risks” (Badiou 2004.40). He lists four dimensions of the desire of philosophy—revolt, logic, universality, and risk—and notes that the dimension of risk, as commitment or decision, is not favoured in our world, because “it is a world in which nobody has the means any more to submit their existence to the perils of chance” (Badiou 2004.41). “Existence,” he writes, “requires more and more elaborate calculation. Life is devoted to calculating security [and] in such a world there is infinitely too much risk in a throw of the dice” (ibid). In realms of strategic foresight and innovation, where tactical practices developed through the many major wars of the twentieth

century are reframed and formulated for processes of finance and development, calculated risks are foregrounded. Yet, risk in relation to the personal, individual, and sexual is demonized — a process perpetuated through law-likely and moralizing social orders. When Badiou insists that the desire of philosophy “implies a dimension of revolt,” he encourages a break from or rejection of the universal, the normative. Preciado, who always already debunks the values of old colonial Europe, pours fuel on Badiou’s implied dimension, writing, “[t]hey say crisis. We say revolution” (Preciado 2019b.53). In saying so, Preciado reveals the revolutionary in the now, and accepts the aleatory nature of revolution, the commitment, risks, and wagers. Though Badiou thinks the universal “is true for all thinking” (2004.39), he provides a twist, or escape writing, “it does so on the basis of a commitment in which chance always plays a role, a commitment which is also a risk or a wager” (ibid). Risk is inherent in commitment, in relationality, in the personal. “To philosophize,” writes Gros, “is to disobey” (Gros 2020.9).

Risk is on the minds of MSM men when they engage in sexual activity, especially anonymous sexual practices. As Marlon Riggs conveys in his documentary, *Tongues Untied* (1989), “now we think as we fuck.” Riggs’s expressly addresses risky sex in the pre-treatment AIDS era, and I put the expression to work in my audio piece, “Any Clinic Any Club (Herd Immunity Mix).”

Managed self risk-taking is embedded in my research through my own HIV status disclosure and the problematic timing (or out-of-time) of my seroconversion in the larger trajectory of AIDS in Toronto. Managed self risk-taking inserts into conversations with artists who are also living this HIV, artists who are not HIV-positive yet respond to AIDS in their creative practice, and artists who represent and embody the role of risk as an ongoing artistic

undertaking. Through managed self risk-taking, I interrupt the so-called normal course of life and, as Halperin notes (in the second epigraph for this section), “resist its established order of meaning” by engaging with concepts of queer time and space, aesthetic self-creation, and activating the productive elements of risk.

The PrEP/U=U landscape advances historical narratives of MSM sex and art through industrial mitigation of risk. This landscape gentrifies the range of risky and ludic sex and art, the outlaw risky MSM sex practices that have thrived in every era of the AIDS crisis, and the evolving contradictions and tensions that collide with remembering forms of risky possibility, examinations of dire risk, harm, and the politics of so-called radical MSM sex. Yet, risk and practices of risking the personal have been vital part of HIV/AIDS-related artwork in significant ways long before the advent of PrEP and U=U. Risk is a much more multi-valent concept and practice that can be measured according to one dimension (such as PrEP or U=U). Any understanding of art, sex, and risk in the current PrEP/U=U universe needs to attend to this history in order to make sense of the current moment, including PrEP and U=U and the other dimensions of risk that I identify in this work.

In her letter to Anzaldúa, Kathy Kendall reflects on a workshop with Audre Lorde, writing, “Audre said we need to speak up. Speak loud, speak unsettling things and be dangerous and just fuck, hell, let it out and let everybody hear whether they want or not” (Anzaldúa 2007.34). From this perspective, the AIDS memoir, specifically, can be crucial in depathologizing the HIV survivor through queer takes on illness and disability that counter medical discourses—a branch of neoliberal managements and investments—and give agency to the individual living with the virus (Cvetkovich 2012.74-75).

“What are the words you do not yet have,” Lorde asks (Lorde 2007.41).

What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? [...] of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger. [...] In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear — fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live. (Lorde 2007.42)

Audre Lorde came to believe, over and over again, that what is most important must be spoken, made verbal (or sonic) and shared, “even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood [...] speaking profits me, beyond any other effect” (Lorde 2007a.40). I understand HIV/AIDS as a watermark on my life. This watermark traces a trajectory that has hindered, shamed, stigmatized, motivated, aroused, and changed me more than any other life experience or creative rallying point. This watermark is dynamic: HIV/AIDS pronounces my evolution. This watermark is permanent and represents both the fear and faculty present in the day-to-day of living with and learning through HIV. “We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired,” writes Lorde (Lorde 2007.44).

For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us. (ibid)

The temporal frame of my seroconversion as “out of time” or “outside of proper time” within the larger Toronto AIDS historical narrative is, in particular, an important object in the theoretical framework of this research as a site of this fear, faculty, and waiting in silence to find fearlessness. This object places me in the present moment as an individual living with HIV in the era of AIDS and industrial mitigations of risk, with the privileges and queer temporalities the era

affords. *My time* (of seroconversion) also produces kinds of atavism, where notions of self are constitutionally affected by the past (Seitler 2008.2). “Indeed, atavism is a ‘reproduction’,” writes Dana Seitler, “and a ‘recurrence’ of the past in the present” (ibid). I use this atavistic framework and tendency to queerly and loosely upset my experience as I wrestle with past-present-future involvement in the crisis: exposure to and familiarity with HIV/AIDS loss and disappearance, ludic and radical and risky sexual ecologies, survivor’s guilt, statistics (that specifically haunt my seroconversion), the optimistic talk of younger people who test HIV-positive and voice hope for a cure on the horizon, and the distinct sensation of becoming a productive yet stigmatized player for the medical-pharmaceutical industrial team.

In a personal narrative (or *auto-fiction*, as the author preferred), French writer Guillaume Dustan celebrates the “sexual and spiritual logic of barebacking, as well as its inevitability” (Bersani and Phillips 2008.36).

Guillaume does almost nothing but fuck, take drugs, and dance the night away in packed gay discos. But *Dans ma chambre*, for all its matter-of-fact presentation of a voluminous quantity of scabrous sexual details, is also rather “respectable.” [...] Above all, Guillaume, who is HIV-positive never has unprotected anal sex — or, more accurately, he only briefly has it, always managing not to ejaculate when he is being the active partner and to avoid receiving the ejaculations of the many tops who enjoy his anal favours. [...] Tireless sexual promiscuity makes for a connectedness based on unlimited bodily intimacies. (Bersani and Phillips 2008.36-37)

Bersani and Phillips also note the similarities between the “theological notion of ‘pure love’ and the dangerous sexual practice of barebacking” (2008.53) may not be immediately clear. Yet, “both can be thought of as disciplines in which the subject allows himself to be penetrated, even replaced, by an unknowable otherness” (ibid). Dustan risks the personal and, in the process, revises risky representations of HIV/AIDS by elevating themes of ludic and radical sex that, not

without ambivalence, celebrate life. Dustan restores the pleasure to a highly sexualized temporal moment that is too often projected and memorialized through dark storm clouds.

Cvetkovich's desire to write a depression memoir was fraught with ambivalence due to the troubled place of memoir within therapeutic culture, "where [memoir] has a tendency to circulate in sensationalizing and personalizing ways that don't lend themselves to the social and political analysis" that she (and that culture) strives for (Cvetkovich 2012.16). Moreover, memoir's place in academia has been met with scepticism about its scholarly value despite the potentialities inherent in counter-narrative forms (Cvetkovich 2012.16, Mackenzie 2013.15). Important to threads of ambivalence is memory's tendency to be an unreliable narrator. To this point, writers must thoughtfully interrogate themselves and identify, feel, and respond to their intuition.

Memory, memoir, and personal narrative are each risky in their own right. Risks include always already knowing that they should not try to be right, creating and sharing stories when the destination is unknown, and writing about lives in so-called invisible ink — that is, lives and persons who are illegible in relation to the status quo. Stories that trace the contours of sexuality, drug and alcohol use, and the production of so-called risky bodies in the HIV/AIDS crisis signal a shift from individual-level narratives of personal responsibility and attribution currently held within popular and academic discourse to those more potent understandings of the "self in the structural" and "the structural in the self" (Mackenzie 2013.15).

In her reflections on memoir as a risky public feelings research method, Cvetkovich writes,

I've had mixed feelings about the decision to publish 'The Depression Journals,' and my uneasiness has taken a number of predictable forms:

that the writing is not good enough, that even if the writing process was useful the product need not be published, that telling this story makes me embarrassingly vulnerable, that sharing my experience (including my ambivalence) constitutes an unseemly flaunting. (2012.74)

Cvetkovich also notes how memoir is frequently disparaged as easy or self-indulgent, two blanket claims about the genre that deeply contrast the experiential difficulty of going public. Insisting that memoir has been an undeniable force in queer subcultures, Cvetkovich understands memoir as an entry point into literary spheres for working-class writers, and foundational in performances (theatre and performance art) and independent presses and publishers (ibid). What separates personal narrative and memoir from exercises in delusion and make-believe? How can they be reconciled, in productive and harm reductive ways, in writing as creative practice?

Delusion, make-believe, detachment, and self-destructive tendencies can, each, take risky—and creative—forms. In her first-person writings on heroin addiction, Seitler interrogates the “unsurprising fantasy of living at risk” as a way to inhabit her “awkward difference from the normative as something positive, to use alienation as an affective strategy of self-affirmation, to be-for-death in a way that, if only temporarily and in various states of anguish, was not so much mitigated by but helped fuel a desire for a different life, or possibility of living” (2018.4). Thinking through her relationship with risk-taking and the forms of outlawism (outlaw sex, outlaw drugs, outlaw politics) that emerged during her period of addiction, Seitler admits that real damage can occur when cultural metaphors (in Seitler’s case, metaphors crafted by and through her respect for and interests in William Burroughs, *Christiane F*, and Carolee Schneemann) become manifest. I try to balance the cultural metaphors that emerge in my research with the experiential knowledge of my participants and my own sexual and drug

practices — a form of sifting the glamorous from the pragmatic and productive. “The practice of sexual outlawry,” writes Halperin, “including the rejection of safety and the courtship of risk [...] exerts a monstrously powerful appeal on some gay men” (2007.85). Seitler turns to personal narrative as a way to dispel such seductions for a number of reasons:

First and foremost, I offer [personal narrative] as an intervening model in current and historical frames for addiction that either result in its sentimentalization, criminalization, or othering. I employ what could be called “critical memory,” or a reflective and theoretical use of personal narrative, to suggest an alternative method of reading nonuniversally about suffering and ambivalence. (Seitler 2018.6)

Seitler’s narrative about drug addiction and risk, and my research of art, sex, and risk have something in common: “an unyielding desire for anxiety-free environments in which intoxication’s promise of capaciousness makes sense of not-belonging, is at least one way a community of alienation might forge itself” (2018.17). Importantly, Seitler’s relationship with risk-tasking and hard drugs is not without ambivalence, especially when users stop using. As Seitler writes,

[W]hen you make the decision to stop using a particular drug, you not only have to live the rest of your life without the object to which you have turned for your greatest relief, release, and pleasure, you also have to live your life as if this fundamental aspect of your personhood—this being-for-death that has operated as your primary drive for so long—were not there. (2018.16)

Seitler also imagines risk as a form of compulsion. Noting the ways that Lee Edelman embraces the death drive as a political metaphor, Seitler understanding a “potential mode of refusal of the heteronormative compulsion that the fetish of the child represents in the space of ‘reproductive futurity’” as descriptive of her own thoughts and actions during her period of addiction, including “outlaw sex, outlaw drugs, outlaw politics” (2018.5). But Edelman’s death

drive does not account for, as Seitler notes, “the real damage that occurs when the [political] metaphor becomes manifest, and for the *various* accounts—psychic, political, experiential, personal, but also atypical and constructed—that inform risk and other forms of compulsion” (ibid). Seitler’s personal narrative becomes an attempt at “producing in coherent form something that is fundamentally incoherent,” a construction of personal truths and ways of organizing personal histories in order to make them “useful, readable, manageable [...] just another extension of what addiction was [for her] in the first place: a fantasy of self-management that things like stories allow us to form and tell” (ibid).

“As women,” writes Lorde, “we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and non-rational knowledge” (Lorde 1978.1). Lorde reminds herself that if she were to have been born mute or, as she writes, “had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die. It is very good for establishing perspective (Lorde 2007.43). Weinberg encourages us to consider that although Lorde does not directly address male homosexuality in her groundbreaking essay, “The Uses of the Erotic,” she does offer valuable perspectives and a critique of the “highly competitive, even capitalist nature of sex as conceptualized in various gay male subcultures. His writing about sex between men on New York City’s piers illustrates transgressions of heteronormativity, but for Lorde, any form of sexual coupling that emphasized immediate sexual gratification was aligned with the pornographic” (Weinberg 2019.24-25).¹⁶ “[W]e have often turned away from the exploration

¹⁶ Weinberg furthers his interrogation of Lorde, actions of heteronormative transgression, and the divisions in feminist and lesbian perspectives, writing, “as influential as Lorde’s writings were among radical lesbians, her emphasis on the erotic as a higher form of sustained connection was not universally embraced by all lesbians” (2019.25). At the same time, he notes how certain lesbian figures, like Pat Califia passionately advocated the transgressive power of public sex.

and consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information, confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic. [...] Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling" (Lorde 1978.2). Transgressions of heteronormative codes, imperatives, and laws, and recreational MSM sex reveals the existence of desire itself in its purest form.¹⁷ Witnessing (and participating in) open sexual exploration as "recreational" removes the institutionalized conditions that Foucault outlines in his interrogations of sex in Christian doctrines. McCaskell's pursuits of recreational sex (represented in my audio work "Intergenerational Crystal Ball") do not seek absolution, they are always already liberated from straight hegemony; they are bound only to pursuits of pleasure (*bios apolaustikos*). I am not talking about MSM sex in relationship to same-sex marriage or other assimilationist tactics that seek to mime the unions, objects, and imperatives that signify the "nightmares of the heteronormative" (Ferguson 2004.82), I am talking about multiple sexual occurrences and partners — and the experiential knowledges and forms of self-creation that can accompany expansive, so-called transgressive activities.

Cruising can generate forms of meaningful social contact that "crosses various power boundaries" (Delany 1999.122) — including class, race, age, disability, and preinvented notions of beauty. "There are as many different styles, intensities, and timbres to sex as there are people," Delany writes (Delany 1999.45). Despite moments of infatuation on both side, Delany notes, "these were not love relationships" (Delany 1999.56).

The few hustlers excepted, they were not business relationships [as so many heterosexual and homonormative marriage unions are]. They were encounters whose most important aspect was that mutual pleasure was exchanges—an aspect that, yes, colored all their other aspects, but that

¹⁷ In his controversial *Now Magazine* article about the risky entanglement of crystal meth and gay sex, "Crystal meth: the new silent epidemic in Toronto's queer community," McCaskell describes himself as, "an old-fashioned boy. I get my recreational sex in the baths" (<<https://nowtoronto.com/news/queer-community-aids-epidemic-crystal-meth/>>, 25 January 2019; sourced 25 June 2019).

did not involve any sort of life commitment [as homonormativity involves]. Most were affable but brief because, beyond pleasure, these were people you had little in common with. Yet what greater field of and force than pleasure can human beings share? [...] The relationships were not (necessarily) consecutive. They braided. They interwove. They were simultaneous. (Delany 1999.56-57)

These relationships did not annoy or distress Delany's live-in partner because "they had their limits" (Delany 1999.57). "They made that central relationship richer [...] by relieving it of many anxieties" (ibid).

Anonymity (or relative anonymity) is key to Delany's *meaningful social contact*. In MSM sexual circles this is defined as *no strings attached* (NSA). "Probably any sexuality," writes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "is a matter of sorting, displacing, reassigning singleness or plurality, literality or figurativeness to a very limited number of sites and signifiers" (Sedgwick (1996.284).

Tenderness [is] brief, contingent, illuminating; [...] holding, guiding, forcing; "your" pleasure and "my," different and often nonsynchronous, pleasure; infinite specificities of flavor, shape, and smell; the galvanized, the paralyzed; the hungry, impartial, desiring regard in which ugliness may be held as intimately as beauty, and age as youth; these are among the elements here splayed through the crystal of anonymity. (ibid)

Sedgwick's locates sexuality as a site of difference, a means of identification (and aesthetic self-creation) and, importantly, as a lens for redefining notions and standards of beauty and aging through the "crystal of anonymity." Sedgwick's proposition sits comfortably with Delany's productive take on anonymous public sex and Moore's understanding of radical MSM sex as the raw material for a social experiment so extreme that he likens it to art: "I am using the idea of sex as art as a metaphor, a way of taking pride in a time that is now unfairly enmeshed in a web of grief and shame" (Moore 2004.xxiv). "Contact," writes Delany, "is the conversation that starts

in the line at the grocery counter with the person behind you while the clerk is changing the paper roll in the cash register" (1999.123).

Very importantly, contact is also the intercourse—physical and conversational—that blooms in and as 'casual sex' in public rest rooms, sex movies, public parks, singles bars, and sex clubs, on street corner and heavy hustling traffic, and in the adjoining motels or the apartments of one or another participant, from which nonsexual friendships and/or acquaintances lasting for decades or a lifetime many spring, not to mention the conversation of a john with a prostitute or hustler may encounter on one or another street corner or in a bar—a relation that, a decade later, has devolved into a smile or a nod. (Delany 1999.123).

In this light, cruising-as-contact becomes a specifically stabilizing practice in interclass relations (Delany 1999.127).

In his memoir, *Logical Family*, author Armistead Maupin similarly cherishes the open, cross-class experiences that anonymous sex in gay bathhouses offers, writing, "only afterward, when I lay spent and happy in the arms of a stranger, another tender man-child like me, did I even begin to notice the secondary matters of race, creed, and national origin. It was a deeply democratizing place" (2017.171). Moreover, sexual play, as Paasonen writes, "further transforms the everyday into scenes of magical, abundant intensity" (Paasonen 2018.65). Delany, too, describes anonymous sexual MSM encounters as egalitarian, solicitous, and socially transformative.

The actuality of such a situation, with thirty-five, fifty, a hundred all-but-strangers in hugely ordered, highly social, attentive, silent, and grounded in a certain care, if not community. [...] It was engrossing; it was exhausting; it was reassuring; and it was very human. (Delany 2004.226)

Moore hopes that we can see "the sexual experimentation of gay men in the 1970s without the filter of AIDS as a series of individual actions and cultural creations that were liberating to some participants and destructive to others, influential in liberal popular culture

and deeply threatening to conservatives” (Moore 2004.5). I imagine how, together, we will see (and experience) all of these possibilities through the sexual ecologies that I write about — including the intellectual and epistemological disobedience and risks that must be activated to realize and produce these ecologies. “[I]f we accept that epistemology gives us the principles and rules of knowing through which the Human and Humanity are understood,” writes Walter Mignolo, “we are trapped in a knowledge system that fails to notice that the stories of what it means to be Human—specifically origins stories that explain who/what we are—are, in fact, narratively constructed” (2015.107). Mignolo identifies systems of sexual belonging in relationship to overarching tropes of control and production, an identification that is useful to understanding a range of risky MSM sex and art, and sexual self-governing (or self-creation) that break free from the practices of exclusion that are implicit in hetero- and homo-normativity.

I understand disobedience and its productively disruptive possibilities in relation to sex through a number of emerging ideas and embodiments: Preciado’s “dissident of the sex-gender system [and] the multiplicity of the cosmos trapped in a binary political and epistemological system (Preciado 2019a.37); Morris’s notion of being *perfectly unreasonable* as a means of forging truly queer worlds “from within the framing of life as being hetero-based” (Morris and Paasonen 2019.146); the *idiot* as a modern-day heretic where, etymologically, “heresy means ‘choice’ [and] the heretic is one who commands *free-choice* [and] the courage to deviate from orthodoxy [and represent] a figure of resistance opposing the violence of consensus [and]

preserves the magic of the outsider (Han 2017.83).¹⁸ As Preciado writes, “[w]e must reject the classifications that form colonial epistemology” (Preciado 2019a.67).

I use the risks and tensions inherent in disobedience (activist, intellectual, epistemological) to confront the uncertainty and precarity produced through industrial mitigations of risk in AIDS, the new chronic, and respectability politics in spaces where “individual passions and demands—the stuff of psychopolitics—complicate paradigms of enlightened rationalism and its contemporary variant, the political science of rational choice” (Apter 2018.153). The truth, for me, is that living with HIV/AIDS in the era of AIDS industrialization branches in three directions: a) modern day miracle for which I am thankful but also resentful, b) the new chronic mode in medicine and its disruption of normative temporality (that is, altered notions of time and ambivalence about planning for the future), and, in turn, c) HIV/AIDS transition from death sentence to life sentence.

Through its reluctant and guarded language, Gilead’s commercial reveals the ways that (homo)sexual risk is silenced or avoided in AIDS narratives through normativity. Historical and evolving narratives of risky MSM sex, art, and cultures are under threat of gentrification. Dustan’s sexual and spiritual logic of barebacking (via the lens of Bersani and Phillips) is translated into an object of counter-aesthetic possibilities through Gilead’s invitation to want more (than so-called safer sex). As Rubin imagined nearly thirty years ago, “AIDS will not last forever. The gay community is already recovering its balance and its strength. There will be a renaissance of gay sex” (2011.240).

¹⁸ “Idiotism” draws be back to Iggy Pop, his 1977 LP, *The Idiot* (London: RCA Records), and that album’s successor, *Lust For Life* (London: RCA Records, 1977) which encourages many of the bases of my dissertation’s work around risk.

Chapter Two: Method

In this chapter, I put three methods to work to explore and understand different ways that artists, activists, and cultural producers have and are taking up themes of risk and imagination in their HIV/AIDS- and sex-related work: 1) participant comprehension (Savastano) and sensory ethnography (Pink); 2) interviews and (auto)ethnography; and 3) creative process and material production or arts practice as research (Barone and Eisner, Sullivan). This chapter is important to my overall dissertation because through these methods I emphasize the importance of imagination, as an artist constructing an arts practice-oriented dissertation that explores and emphasizes art and artistic practice, and the ways that risk is an ongoing artistic undertaking. Moreover, I understand risk as a form of harm reduction—in art and sex—through the processes of self-creation and cultural production that managed self risk-taking take in my research: risks start conversations, play is at the heart of creativity, risk-taking is a form of negotiating safety through the accumulation of experiential knowledge (or personal memory). Through examination of the role of sound, music, and listening in my dissertation, I reveal the kinds of sonic relationships that are created, particularly through and across the constellations of risk and outlaw sexual practices (specifically in an AIDS playlist, outlined in Chapter Six). Additionally, I use this examination of sound, music, and listening to focus on vinyl audio culture and the activist potential that culture presents. This focus culminates in my audio intervention: *Soft Subversions*.

I use this entanglement of methods to demonstrate how risk can create an escape from homonormative and preinvented worlds and engage with the textures of those escapes by emphasizing affect, risk (through participant comprehension), and role of sentience and

experiential knowing (through sensory ethnography and interviews) inherent in my research. This entanglement focuses attention on the role of art and arts-oriented expressions and understandings of sexual risk that respond to and transcend HIV/AIDS technologies of mitigating risk by keeping pace with the persistent dialectic of risk that runs across four decades of HIV/AIDS. These methods respond to my central research question individually and collectively. This chapter consequentially pushes beyond the boundaries of conventional academic methods review to include creative processes and practices—including sonic arts and audio production. Importantly, I use this entanglement of methods to respond to the overall argument about risk in my dissertation by risking the personal through participant comprehension, through engagement with ways of feeling and knowing to better understand sexual ecologies, through creative production that engages risk-taking and representations of HIV/AIDS and its intersections, and MSM sex.

In this chapter, I reveal the conversational links between artistic practice and scholarly research: the links between scholarly research, as it is pursued by individuals who identify first and foremost as artists, and creative material production. I also locate underlying tensions between art and scholarly practice through processes of interpretation. *To understand is to interpret* (Sontag 2009.5). As Susan Sontag writes,

The modern style of interpretation excavates, and as it excavates, destroys; it digs “behind” the text, to find a sub-text which is the true one. [...] And to interpret is to restate the phenomenon, in effect to find an equivalent for it. [...] Interpretation must itself be evaluated, within a historical view of human consciousness. In some cultural contexts, interpretation is a liberating act. It is a means of revising, of transvaluing, of escaping the dead past. In other cultural contexts, it is reactionary, impertinent, cowardly, stifling. [...] In a culture whose already classical dilemma is the hypertrophy of the intellect at the expense of energy and

sensual capability, interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art.
(Sontag 2009.5-7)

Sontag nails the demonizing possibilities in interpretation. In doing so, she positions herself *against*. In my own practice, I understand interpretation as a space of that opens between the writer/reader, the composer/listener, and the artist/viewer. Moreover, I understand this space of interpretation as a creative tool in its own right and put it to work in different ways. For example, I can narrow the space in order to reveal a more legible and thus shorter path to understanding on the part of the receiver; I expand the space of interpretation in ways that encourage independent thinking and responsive action on the part of the listener, viewer, audience: collaboration. These different ways are explored and experienced in the audio and video interventions.

Throughout this chapter—and my dissertation research—collaboration and artistic interaction perform significant roles: in relation to participant comprehension (and the nature and context of the interactions that underscore this method), in interviews, and in the vinyl and video interventions. The collaborators perform an important role in my dissertation as individual voices that bring diverse and experiential knowledge to the work. I view their participation as vital sites of knowing that not only embolden my research but also expand and deepen my own experiential and creative trajectory in relation to HIV/AIDS and artistic production that responds to the virus. I value these voices for the collaborative possibilities (and new ways of thinking) that they generate, and for the kinds of indispensable (and necessary) community-building and action that emerges through these creative and collaborative networks.

Through my empirical research, I understand the creativity of my role as collator and interpreter of my participant's views which I developed in my conversations with them. A critical

part of my contribution was through the understanding of risk as multidimensional; as a response to homonormative and preinvented worlds, HIV stigmatization and criminalization, and human rights (including the right to love); the critical connections between risk (in art, life, and sex) and concepts of aesthetic self-creation; in relation to intellectual, epistemological, and socio-sexual disobedience; practices of harm reduction; and mitigations produced by the medical industrial complex. I developed the interview questions through work that was informed by theory and my choice of interlocutors. I asked the questions, pondered the responses, and formulated the responses into the four themes that organize my dissertation (including but not limited to my creative interventions).

This chapter includes sections for each of the primary methods: 1) participant comprehension and participant sensing, 2) interviews, and 3) vinyl and video (arts practice as research method). This methodological constellation responds directly and productively to my central research question and argument by generating three important elements that relate to the role that the PrEP/U=U produces in historical/evolving narratives of risky MSM sex, art, and HIV/AIDS: 1) experiential understanding (through participant comprehension and the collaborative characterization of the interviews); 2) art works about risk, sex, ludic practice, and biopolitical and neoliberal managements of and investments in of HIV/AIDS; and, 3) scholarly knowledge about living, aging, and sexing with HIV; the medical industrial complex; and shifts in the field of HIV/AIDS through the implementation of PrEP and U=U. In this way, each methodological piece contributes to my dissertation in vital ways.

A/r/tography (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, and Gouzouasis) is a research method that represents the living and entwined practices of being an artist, researcher, and teacher and

understands “the practice of living inquiry in and through the arts in diverse and divergent ways” (Irwin and Springgay 2008.xix). A/r/tography guides my methodological constellation in a way that does not seek approaches from other research fields. like social sciences or humanities, to make sense of art: it allows art to stand on its own and become material research in and of itself. In this way, a/r/tography bridges with Sontag’s position *against interpretation*. In my dissertation, I use a/r/tography to frame creative processes (mine and those of the participants) and construct an actual a/r/tography out of the research I have undertaken about and with participant artists, activists, and curators, and includes my own creative practice and output (audio, video), and the material work of my interviewees as part of the conversation. I analyse the interviews through my audio intervention. Participant comprehension and participant sensing, and the ideas behind the material work of participant practices and my own practice contribute to my dissertation’s larger a/r/tography.

Participant Comprehension and Participant Sensing

In this section, I outline the distinguishing characteristics of participant comprehension as it contrasts with traditional methods of participant observation. Participant comprehension is critical in my beeswax as a framework of understanding and activating the risky fieldwork research required for my dissertation — including the suspension of belief necessary for entry into spaces where occult meaning and experience prevail (as an entanglement of MSM sex and spirituality), and the implicit risks that underscore risking the personal when a researcher enters into realms where instructions and procedures are often given from within a culture, including directives from teachers, shamans, and gurus. In gay bathhouses, sex clubs, and darkrooms,

these figures might include bondage and discipline and sadomasochism (BDSM) masters or “tops.” In this context, imaginative transformation is enacted through sexual practices as conveyance or form of communication where participants put bodies and minds to work in a kind of non-relation and/or non-knowledge. Participant comprehension creates a distinctive window in practices of voluntary and managed risk-taking in art, sex, and ludic exploration. Similarly, sensory ethnography practice—concerned with mainly smell, taste, touch, or vision—is used to extend sentience in ways that responds to my dissertation’s argument and central problem in relation to socio-sonic sites like discos, bathhouses, darkrooms, and spaces where public sex occurs.

Participant comprehension is a distinctive experiential practice that can expose the researcher to implicit risks of domains of occult meaning and experience, and “frequently requires the ‘suspension of belief’ necessary for entry into domains of occult meaning and experience” (Savastano 2007.19). This practice is different from the more common method of participant observation in that the researcher, rather than being a passive observer, becomes actively immersed in order to understand the inner workings and consequences of risky MSM sexual practices and community, and modalities of anonymous sex. There is, as Peter Savastano writes, “[a] blurring of the lines between ethnographer and informant [that is] not only beneficial but unavoidable” (Savastano 2007.18). Savastano, a major figure in this kind of *experiential* research method, notes:

Experiential anthropologists place the emphasis of their fieldwork on “participation comprehension” [which] means following the instructions and procedures given from within the culture (perhaps as given by a teacher, shaman, or guru) [and] leaving oneself open to whatever experiences arise as a consequence of performing ritual and symbolic practices and recording what happens, using whatever symbolic media

are available. (Savastano 2007, 18-19)

Savastano makes important connections between MSM sexual exploration, spirituality, transformation, and the oneiric that are also present in my work. "It seems to me," writes Savastano, "that whatever attempts we queer men make to think and write about gay male spirituality, and to devise practices to hasten us on our way, must be the products of our own consciousness, whether as a result of our dream, meditations, or psychosexual explorations" (Savastano 2007.27). Participant comprehension differentiates between the many experiential and experimental elements that are crucial to my dissertation and contrasts with traditional methods of participant observation. Sensory ethnography leads to practices of place-making, auditory knowledge, concepts of acoustemology, and the sound(s) of ethnography (including soundscape composition and sensory intimacy). Sensory ethnography is concerned with sense of smell, taste, touch, vision, and sound to extend sentience in ways that is valuable in relation to socio-sonic sites like discos, bathhouses, darkrooms, and spaces where MSM sex occurs. Additionally, sensory ethnography plays a role in some of the interviews where sexual practices and drugs are discussed — a role that reveals many of the expanded sentient possibilities that emerge when we risk the personal to talk about ludic or radical or risky sexual ecologies, and HIV/AIDS.

MSM must draw from diverse sources to achieve self-realization, self-creation. These sources include, as Savastano writes, "intellectual, devotional or ritualistic [ones], in order to locate themselves within their chosen tradition and still remain fully attentive to who they are as psycho-spiritual-sexual beings" (2007.12). Sensory ethnographies, like Pink's, can deepen notions of such domains. "Taking a sensory approach to understanding and intervening in the

world," writes Pink, "might help to make it a better place" (2015.68). Pink argues that a sensory ethnography should be based "in a collaborator and participatory approach to research that respects research participants and recognizes that ethnography might have a role in the real world as well as in academia" (ibid). This approach aligns with one of my dissertation goals: to narrow the gap between the two often-polarized sites of academia and community. In context with the interviews and material production surveyed in my dissertation, these methodologies take on vibrant clarity and resonance.

Savastano's research on spirituality, homosexuality, and the forms of *bricolage* that can be understood as queer cultural signatures make "connection[s] between tantric sexual practice and the cultivation of gay spirituality" (Savastano 2007.17). These connections highlight the links between curative, healing, or salvific processes, MSM sexuality and self-creation, and the creative representations and productions shared in my dissertation research. Sex is often a means by which MSM "enter heightened states of consciousness [and] the psychosexual, tantric-like techniques developed by The Body Electric School [such as] breathing exercises and eye contact" open up boundless possibilities to a community paralyzed by fear of infection through contact, a fear that has in many cases progressed to internalized homophobia (Savastano 2007.13). Artist AA Bronson describes the school's Sacred Intimate workshop as a, "radical, gay, neo-tantric, pseudo-psychological, sex-positive [retreat that can] spawn an international community of men seeking to be healers to their people, and seeking to be healed" (2001.54). This illuminates the risky measures implicit in participant comprehension as well as the community-minded benefits.

Participant comprehension and its risks specifically underscore the concept of risking the personal (as it is defined and expanded in Chapter One). Participant comprehension guides the fieldwork where I immerse into sites of MSM activity (above) and engage in ludic time/play through drug experimentation, all of which involve measures of voluntary and managed self-risk taking. Savastano's emphasis on the teacher and shaman is also present in Anzaldúa's practice of risking the personal. Through this practice, Anzaldúa came to realize that she was trying to practice the "oldest 'calling' in the world — shamanism," and that she was practicing it in a new way (Anzaldúa 2009.121). As Anzaldúa writes:

The role of the shaman is [...] to preserve and create cultural or group identity by mediating between the cultural heritage of the past and the present everyday situations people find themselves in. [...] Like the shaman, we transmit information from our consciousness to the physical body of another. If we're lucky we create, like the shaman, images that induce altered states of consciousness conducive to self-healing. (Anzaldúa 2007.121-122).

s

I use this preserving and creating cultural or group identity through my understanding of historical/evolving narratives of risky MSM sex and art as both a cultural past and the present everyday situations in MSM sexual community in the PrEP/U=U landscape. Moreover, I see Anzaldúa's "self-healing" as the aesthetic self-creation that is crucial in my work. Keating describes Anzaldúa's radical self-reflexive writing process as "risking the personal to underscore the dangers involved" (2009.13). This practice is of particular importance with respect to the role of autobiography in a/r/tographic processes (discussed below). My research turns the object (risk) in ways where my self-reflexive explorations and material productions risk the personal to underscore the desires, pleasures, and otherwise possibilities under examination. Risking the personal entangles with processes of imaginative transformation to take (and hold) critical

positions in relationship to the ways that community and self (through facets of the personal) are experienced, conveyed, and represented. As Scarry writes, “the more completely a state [such as pain or pleasure] is experienced as its object, the closer it lies to imaginative self-transformation” (1985.163). Scarry’s concept of imaginative transformation closely aligns with the centrality of self-creation in my work. Sex, itself, can be a conveyance or form of imaginative transformation where the participants put both bodies and minds to work in a kind of non-relation (Preciado) and/or non-knowledge (Berlant and Edelman).

I use participant comprehension to create a distinctive window in practices of voluntary and managed risk-taking in practices of art and sex. I put this method to work through interviews with artists (where issues of sex, safety, gender, race, and class produced generative tensions), immersive Saturday nights at The Black Eagle disco (a space originally designated as a backroom for cruising and anonymous sex, and transformed into one of Toronto’s most valuable MSM socio-sonic spaces that welcomes all genders) and other venues where music is used to connect the dots between “gay” and “sex,” Sunday afternoons at a gay bathhouse (“\$20 Research Sundays”), or warm summer evenings in David Balfour Park (among other Toronto cruising sites).

Why did I choose participant comprehension for my dissertation? Truth be known, participant comprehension in many ways chose me: I actively and voluntarily take managed risks in and with the spaces, times, and creativities that are represented and explored in my dissertation. As a recovering white, Anglo-Saxon protestant (WASP), I am always on the lookout

for ways to heal the wounds inflicted by my upbringing and cultural persuasion.¹⁹ Through this particular methodological lens, I am confronted by and sexually engage with individuals who bring various perspectives: for example, they do not know their HIV status, they are on PrEP, they are on the down-low, they are transgendered, they are in a ludic state (through drugs or other circumstances), they have little to no prior knowledge of HIV/AIDS.

In my dissertation, participant comprehension is a method that underscores the dangers involved, is a risky extension to autoethnographic practice (in that it can immerse the researcher in experimentation, ritualistic situations), and follows the instructions of so-called shamans and gurus in MSM landscapes where sexuality and spirituality entangle. For example, Joseph Kramer developed important practices for MSM connectivity and intimacy during the pre-treatment AIDS era through The Body Electric School, his centre for educational experiences grounded in the erotic and its integration with the sacred to foster transformative personal and communal healing.²⁰ As a kind of shaman or guru for MSM sexual communities and citizenry during wartime, Kramer's practices guide much of my fieldwork in relation to bathhouses, darkrooms, and sites of public sex.

Sensory ethnography is important to the place-making practice that emerges in my audio site recordings and audio works — especially the place-making involved in locating and aurally documenting socio-sonic sites where (ludic or radical or risky) sexual ecologies emerge. Sarah Pink reminds us that “recording takes you there, into that place, and you have a very

¹⁹ In a particularly vivid example from the late 1990s, I was discussing a queer friend with my mother. She asked if he was HIV-positive. When I replied in the negative, she insisted on the role of intelligence in relation to AIDS, saying, “I didn’t think he was smart enough to avoid infection.”

²⁰ <<https://www.bodyelectric.org/>>

sensuous, affective feeling relationship with voice and place by listening” (2015.174-175). Like many of the examples in Pink’s surveys, my sound works (both site recordings and the cultivated and representational audio works-as-analyses) are not intended solely for academic audiences but are situated as scholarship through my multi-modal research that “theorizes experience, intimacy and sound as place-making practice” (Pink 2015.175). The ideas that “sound recordings can represent a sense of intimacy” and that editing involved techniques, such as my audio production strategies, heighten and mark that “sense of intimacy and spontaneity and contact between recorder and recorded, between listener and sound” are crucial to my dissertation (Pink 2015.174).

I use sensory ethnography and participant sensing to activate the concept of acoustemology that can be understood as “an exploration of sonic sensibilities, specifically of ways in which sound is central to making sense, to knowing, to experiential truth” (Pink 2015.174). Sensory ethnographies, as Pink writes, “both attend to and interpret the experiential, individual, idiosyncratic and contextual nature of research participants’ sensory practices *and* also seek to comprehend [and, in the case of my work, participate in] the culturally specific categories, conventions, moralities and knowledge that inform how people understand their experiences” (Pink 2015.12-13). Sensory ethnography explores, as Pink notes:

[T]he question of the relationship between sensory perception and culture, engages with questions concerning the status of vision and its relationship to the other senses [specifically olfactory and practices of listening that are central to my research], and demands a form of reflexivity that goes beyond the interrogation of how culture is ‘written’ to examine the sites of embodied knowing. (Pink 2015.13)

I use this concept of embodied knowing through my exploration of sound in socio-sonic spaces and the ways that people respond in embodied and knowing ways to the sonic soundtrack that

activates such spaces. Embodied knowing is also vital in MSM sexual and artistic practices that respond to issues of homonormativity, preinvented worlds, and HIV/AIDS.

The methods and approaches of conventional participant observation can benefit from being fused with the reflexive and “emplaced methodology” (Pink 2015.98) proposed in Pink’s sensory ethnography. Importantly, these methods and approaches are dissociated from, as Pink writes, “the idea that vision is necessarily the dominant sense” (ibid). Thus, the critical role of sound in my work emphasizes the basis of Pink’s notion of “the ‘participant sensing’ of the sensory ethnographer” (ibid). Learning through an emplaced engagement—such as a gay bathhouse, a cruising park, a fisting session where MSM gather around a sling to participate or simply watch and absorb the psychosexual energies, listings on Grindr or Scruff, or an artist’s studio where material responses to risky sex are in-process—produces new understandings about practices and identities. This involves, as Pink writes, “a reflexivity and self-consciousness about this learning process, establishing connections between sensory experience, specific sensory categories and philosophical, moral and other value-laden discourses (and the power relations and political processes they might be connected to), and creating relationships between these and theoretical scholarship (Pink 2015.107). This involvement is important in relation to a goal in my research to narrow the gap between academia and community.

My site recordings of gay bathhouses and public sex sites, and the associated sounds of mostly-anonymous encounters of intimacy, can take the listener there, into that place—or emplacement—and “[they] can have a very sensuous, affective, feeling relationship with voice and place by listening (Feld and Brenneis 2004.468). The production of a sense of intimacy in sonic ethnographic representation can, as Pink notes, “contribute to a moral project of

increasing intercultural awareness” (2015.175). The construction of auditory knowledge through acoustemology can be represented to audiences that are unfamiliar with such ways of experiencing and knowing (ibid). Thus, the so-called “sound of ethnography” (Pink 2015.1973) such as soundscape composition and sensory intimacy, involves recording as a research practice and composition as a representational practice. In this way (and in my work, sound recording allows artist-researchers to “create permanent edited [and cultivated] recordings or compositions that might be disseminated to wide audiences” (ibid). Notable in this practice is Canadian sound theorist and composer R. Murray Schafer whose seminal soundscape arts practice-led research and theory is highly influential in the hybrid movement of sound ethnography and sound art.

I use sensory ethnography and participant sensing in two ways: 1) participant interviews and their affective and sometimes sensuous ebb and flow, layers of creative and unconscious knowing, and the collaborative spirit that can emerge when artists dialogue or engage in sexually-charged ways such as shared erotic storytelling (intimate experiential truth sharing); and 2) audio/field recording as acoustemology—listening, knowing, experiential—when I audio record sexualized sites. I produce field recordings (including participant interview as a form of affective field recording)—that is, treat and manipulate with spatial, temporal, textural, tonal effects—as permanent, edited, cultivated compositions that I disseminate through an info-jacketed vinyl record format. This transformation is, in itself, a temporal and spatial process and representation, and represents a meaningful social contact. This transformation activates socio-sonic space and triggers vibrotactility.

I record a predetermined pathway along (and around) the outer perimeter hallway at a

Toronto gay bathhouse (included in my audio work as "House of Intergenerational: Walkabout"). This larger circular walk maps the margins of the space; at the heart, a glass DJ cabin centres a so-called lounge comprised of one grand U-shaped seating area that typically plays host to an assortment of fleshy clusters, furry, grunting. This pulsing lounge neighbours a glass-walled shower for six men on one side and a darkroom maze including open sling area on the other. The DJ directs the heartbeat of this community of clusters through to the margins. My recording documents the heartbeat, and the spatialized affect created by the predetermined outer pathway that plays on it. In this way it produces in the listener a *very sensuous, affective, feeling relationship with voice and place*.

Interviews

Interviews, in my dissertation, involve both ethnographic and autoethnographic research methods. As qualitative ethnographic research method, interviews help me to collect and analyse social and cultural life in particular social systems that bridge art, artistic practice, HIV/AIDS discourse, risk discourse, and MSM community. In some interview contexts, both participant and I belong to the same social system and, in this way, the interview becomes an autoethnographic descriptive study. I chose interviews as a direct method of access to art and artistic practice where risk-taking is evident, and as a means of developing new collaborative spaces in my audio intervention. The selection process was guided by the theme of HIV/AIDS and creative responses to AIDS, a participant's track record with respect to risky ideas and production, and queer or gay identity. One objective of my interviews is a better understanding how can art be put to work in different ways and from diverse perspectives (as per the four

themes) in conversation with (and as a tool to deconstruct) the complex and often violent experiential, social, political, medical, administrative, and affective issues of HIV/AIDS, risk, living with the new chronic, and biopolitical and neoliberal managements of and investments in HIV/AIDS in the era of chronic disease treatment and the AIDS industrial complex. Specifically, interviews formulate the collaborative nature of my work. I asked my participants for formative, instrumental, creative, and experiential insights, and through this process I create space in my work for their words, ideas, and practices as a response to my dissertation's central problem. For example, during my interview with HIV-positive artist Shan Kelley, he describes Truvada as having a purpose that is important in the role it plays: a means to avoid a very specific kind of transmission: HIV. But, as Kelley notes, "I don't know that [PrEP] has to be the one piece that invalidates all other risk, or that creates and invites more risk. I think it's just another piece" (Kelley, interview).

Responses that emerged in interviews helped me to develop four themes that formulate the debates and key points. These themes are used to organize interview responses in relation to Chapter One. In some cases, themes specifically materialized through response to and discussion of my research questions and the agreement with and/or contrasting perspectives brought by interviewees. Due to the intersectional character of AIDS and the ways that AIDS issues—and the lived experiences of people living with the virus—can overlap, there is some slippage in the ways I stock the four themes. The concept of radical MSM sex as an historical trope of social justice and a current modality of the evolving status of safety in the PrEP/U=U landscape produced some lively discussions. In other instances, issues about PrEP and/or safety in sexual practices were less relevant to the interviewees, their personal experiences, creative

practices, and/or specific community identifications. For example, Hogan-Finlay was less inclined to discuss PrEP as it did not, from her point of view, engage the lesbian community that she identifies with. Hogan-Finlay did, however, bring vital information about the creative possibilities of public and mixed-gender sexual activity to my research in relation to her mobile installation, *A/V Steam*. Additionally, Muscat's relation to safety in sexual practice is one of resistance: he has, since the beginning of the AIDS crisis, never practiced so-called safer sex. He does, however, hold to high standards of personal responsibility in his socio-sexual practices. As a result, Muscat's knowledge of or interest in PrEP is limited. In this way, some themes are discussed at great length, others less so. Importantly, interviewees represent voices from both HIV-positive and HIV-negative perspectives. From this point of departure, I locate PrEP in my dissertation as one moment in a larger continuum of risky art and artistic practices rather than as a separate element.

Importantly, the interviews (and the work that came into focus through the conversations) impact, deepen, and expand my understandings of HIV/AIDS (specifically understandings forged and potentially limited through my individual experience), voluntary and managed risk-taking as productive, and the ways that art and artistic practice can challenge the codes and imperatives of homonormative and preinvented worlds. In this research into art, sex, risk, and AIDS, the voices of HIV-negative artists are important as balance and insight. The actual process of the interviews and the ways certain information evolves into my audio and video work can be understood as magic: the temporal/spatial intersection where the artist mind understands otherwise possibilities.

Interviews are an important method in my dissertation to develop and arrive at the four key themes in my research: risking the personal; (ludic or radical or risky) sexual ecologies; art, artistic practice, and risk; and HIV/AIDS, intersectionality, and its risky representations. One important reason for choosing to involve interviews in my research is the spoken word samples that emerge from the interviews and the ways that these samples (and sounds) are put to work in my audio, video, and written interventions. A number of interviews produced radical, risky, and dynamic expressions of the four key themes in my research through perspectives that span pre- and post-industrial mitigations of risk. Select spoken statements and sounds are featured in the audio works and, in some cases, inform the primary message of an audio work and/or the cut-up process used to create audio work titles.

The importance of the interviews is twofold: 1) to gain access to inner workings and processes of artists from diverse racial, gendered, and class backgrounds who work in diverse media, some of whom are living with HIV or whose lives have been touched by the crisis; and 2) to problematize my own perspectives and creative representations through collaborative conversation and artistic interaction. This collaborative element is critical to my dissertation as a form of productive exchange. Art and artist practices that respond to sex, risk, and HIV/AIDS at the intersection of race, gender, age, disability, and class inform the heart of my dissertation. One objective of the interviews is a better understanding how can art be put to work in different ways and from diverse perspectives in conversation with (and as a tool to deconstruct) the complex and often violent experiential, social, political, medical, administrative, and affective issues of HIV/AIDS, risk, living with "the new chronic," and biopolitical and neoliberal managements of and investments in HIV/AIDS in the era of chronic disease treatment and the

AIDS industrial complex. Specifically, interviews help me respond to and reveal the ways art can be used to imagine, convey, and productively create principled critiques and representations of a PrEP/U=U landscape that can make the historical/evolving narratives of AIDS and MSM sex and art visible to mainstream eyes, ears, and bodies and, in turn, produce a more just and fecund setting for new sexual ecologies.

Translating sexual connectivity, and the intimacies that are possible through artistic interrelation reveals many exciting, new insights. For example, when I spoke with an HIV-positive queer poet of colour, the focus of conversation shifted from the role of the magical in risk to the ways that whiteness pressures and confines nonwhite desires, and the inherent queer spirit of bacchanal in Caribbean cultures, cultures that are regularly maligned as hyper homophobic. One lesbian-identified artist spoke about her mobile bathhouse installed in a U-Haul truck, *A/V Steam*. *A/V Steam* weaves together narratives of anonymous mixed-gender public sex (a radical and risky proposition), stereotypical (and witty) iconographies of lesbian relationships, with issues of mobility and access. When I spoke with a male artist living with HIV, he shared both his pleasures in anonymous bathhouse sex and the senses of comfort, security, and futurity that a binary gender domestic relationship and parenting brings to his life. Trading stories with an HIV-positive activist in my generation creates a platform to talk—openly and candidly—about safer sex in relation to bathhouse culture and the ways the PrEP/U=U universe is creating positive change, however slowly.

Importantly, the interviews (and the work that came into focus through the conversations) impacted, deepened, and expanded my own, situated understandings of HIV/AIDS, practices of managed self risk-taking, and the ways that art can challenge normativity

and rewrite scripts to homonormative and preinvented worlds. The actual process of the interviews and the ways certain information evolved into my audio and video work can be understood as magic: the temporal/spatial intersection where the artist mind understands otherwise possibilities.

The Questions

I used five basic questions in order to establish the interview groundwork, and to create a collaborative space for imagining and branching toward fluid, creative engagement. Importantly, the questions created movement in the interviews that, in turn, directed the development and fine-tuning of the four themes that organize my dissertation. I used these questions to develop with specific parameters and understandings: the interviewees positionality in intersection with risk in relation to the personal; risky, ludic, and radical sexual ecologies; art and artistic practice that responds to HIV/AIDS; the participant's awareness about historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and art in the era of AIDS industry; and possible and personal creative goals in response to the AIDS crisis. I developed the five questions, as follows, to create the circumstances for possible, deeper conversation and artistic interaction:

1. How do you self-identify in relationship to HIV/AIDS?
2. What are the most critical HIV/AIDS issues for you in your art (or curatorial or activist) practice and what do you hope to achieve on artistic, personal, and/or community levels?
3. What is the current status of "safe"?
4. What does disability look and/or sound like in context with HIV/AIDS?
5. What does risk look and/or sound like?

I used the fifth question, in particular, as an art-minded (that is visual and/or audio oriented) inquiry that required the respondent to activate their creative skills and thinking. As well, this question often determined the direction of the conversation. In a snapshot (a fuller picture will be revealed in the two creative interventions), risk looks or sounds like: a gamble, desperation, magic, hope, the next show, silence over meth use in relationship with MSM sex in Toronto, a tool for truth-finding, self-truth, and opportunity. I chose to portray the interview materials directly, paying close attention to the participants' voices as a form of participant sensing, and a critical interpretive action, before I moved into my studio phase.

Vinyl/Video: For the Record

Ultimately the phonograph records are not artworks but the black seals on the missives that are rushing towards us from all sides in the traffic with technology; missives whose formulations capture the sounds of creation, the first and the last sounds, judgment upon life and message about that which may come thereafter.
—Theodor Adorno (1990.61)

AIDS, art, sex, and risk. *My body is on record.*

The audio and video methodological practices used in my dissertation are examples of arts practice-led research and are integral to my arts practice-oriented project. What I do is make and record music and/or organize sound, and press vinyl records of these recordings as a form of self-publishing-as-artist-practice, as activist tool, as resistance to the digital music industry, its ongoing recycling of existing musics in new and frequency-compromised formats, and its treatment of artists as industrial fodder for the taking. Through both vinyl and video, I explore MSM community and cultural benefits in relationship to LGBTQI and HIV/AIDS socio-sonic spaces, practices, and metrics of vibrotactility. In a brief history of recorded sound via vinyl and

the meaning(s) of sound, music, and listening as dynamic cultural and community practices, I demonstrate the ways that vinyl becomes a vital location of collaboration, artistic interaction, resistance, and activism that can cut across intersections of HIV/AIDS—race, gender, age, (dis)ability, and class—and create meaningful social contacts (qua Delany). Additionally, I explore the ways that the vinyl record can transform DJ practice into semionautics by producing original pathways through signs and opening previously illegible linkages between disparate sites. The video performs a secondary function as ambient support to my sound works.

I choose these methods because of the central role that sound plays in my creative trajectory and, specifically in relation to audio/vinyl, as a means of producing tools for cultural outreach and community activism. The video, too, holds promise as a means of media outreach through broadcast, gallery, digital social networking platforms, and private use. In relation to arts practice as research method, my audio and video interventions use ideas and existing work from participating artists and their practices in entanglement with and relation to my own creative processes and production: collaboration and artistic collaboration (which is discussed further, below). To expand and deepen this processes and practices, I use Seitler's method of reading sideways to move through and across the different interviewee creative practices, and to understand the differences that age, class gender, and race bring to these practices and the experiential knowledges they express. Through reading sideways, Seitler puts a name to a practice in which many scholars in the humanities already engage. I extend Seitler's method to include "listening sideways" as a form of lateral hearing and over-hearing. Reading—and listening—sideways through vivid examples of literature, music, and visual artworks that risk the personal include Wojnarowicz's creative and activist works, and his creative concept: the

preinvented world; Ono, who believes that her works are not completed until they find a viewer, reader, listener, or audience; and the art and artistic practices that my interview participants develop and produce through risk-taking and/or risking the personal. I used these ways of reading and sensing, and the artistic interactions that emerged in the interviews as a form of creative structure. I listened to and sensed the differences in each interview and each response to AIDS, sex, and the creative processes involved to develop the audio intervention. I used participant sensing to imagine the kind of sonic setting (and the audio citations that colour and characterize each setting) as an important part of my artistic mapping for this work.

Why is vinyl important to this research and what work does vinyl do in relationship to LGBTQI and HIV/AIDS socio-sonic practices and metrics of vibrotactility? In what ways does collaboration and artistic interaction impact sound, listening, and creativity? How are these “black seals,” as Adorno describes the vinyl record, missives of power, resistance, struggle and, importantly, risk? Vinyl records are vital in historical narratives of MSM sexual practices. They represent the primary audio format in the eras when risky and outlaw MSM sexual practices flourished and were the central tool in DJ practices in that era. These DJ practices evolved, thanks to vinyl and practices of beat-mixing (that is, transitioning from one song to the next without a break) in important ways in relation to concepts of non- and recombinant-teleological approaches that emerged in the 1970s as desire creation, and fuelled gay disco dance floors by producing endless sonic soundtracks that entwined in creative ways with libido, drug-use, and MSM desire.

The vinyl record is a sensual technology. The true DJ performs a kind of sonic seduction through the handling—touch—of this sensual technology, and the locking of the needle in the

record's grooves, effectively fucking the stereo field (left-right), and the production of soundscapes that demand a corporeal response. The needle reads both sides of the groove (again, the stereo field), a live translation of the recording itself through the needle's vibrational responses that produce waves of (audio) affect and movement. These waves encounter ears, bodies, minds, and spirits in ways that reveal layers of unconscious knowing in listeners and dancers, in touch with things unseen yet clearly felt, invisible to the human eye and always deeply personal. "[T]o listen to records becomes work in itself," writes Nicolas Bourriaud, "which diminishes the dividing line between reception and practice, producing new cartographies of knowledge. This recycling of sounds, images, and forms, implies incessant navigation within the meanderings of cultural history, navigation which itself becomes the subject of artistic practice" (Bourriaud 2002.18).

Collaborative process is at the heart of the audio intervention. I understand the spoken word segments (and the lyrical content generated by Robert Bolton) as collaborative in that they enliven and spark my compositional and audio production activities in fresh ways. More directly, the words and sounds of Bolton and the interviewees elicited creative responses in me. This kind of artistic interaction is essentially collaborative. What is critical here is how the participants' ideas and aesthetics influenced the sound works. In the case of Bolton, I learned to develop a deeper sense of "soul" in my sound work — both in terms of his creative use of hip-hop vocalization and its roots in rhythm and blues and soul musics, and my interest in translating (or transposing) that sense of soul into disco and house music. This is evidenced in "AIDS Over Now" and "Any Clinic Any Club." With respect to the different interviews and the ideas that emerged, I sensed the important threads of experiential knowledge and creative process that responded

to my dissertation's central problem, and edited and used specific vocal samples to work in counterpoint with the kinds of sonic environments that I outline in my AIDS Playlist.

When Bolton flips the meaning of the word "record," from noun to verb and back again, I am inclined to respond in ways where the sound works in direct response to his words.

When I'm turned on, there's always that red light lit.
 When my body is on record.
 And it's kind of beautiful, when you realize your weapon
 is inside. The body is a conduit.
 There's a vibe to it. Ride 'til you die like you're Juliet.
 There's certain music and science to it.
 When my body is on record.
 When I fuck, there's always this red light lit. (Bolton, "AIDS Not Over")

In this lyrical passage, Bolton responds directly to my rough notes on the vexed intersection of HIV and disability: his body is on record (that is, the studio red light is "lit," signalling record mode) and is on record (documented, on public health records, and on my dissertation vinyl record). His red light triggers a number of images: red light district, a warning sign, a signal for heat, and—as above—a studio utility to let people know that recording is in process and "be quiet." In response, I move the instrumental in sultry and evocative ways, love unlimited (so-to-speak), and also with a dash of caution; and the temporal character of the track (AIDS Not Over) is noticeably strange in the ways it shifts tempo and so-called time signature.

Vinyl records can reproduce both musical sounds of desire and sex, and the affects associated with fetish as the turntable needle literally fucks the grooves of Side A before *finishing off* in Side B and, in the process, generating heat through friction. When Rubin thinks about fetish, she wants to know about many other things. "I do not see how one can talk about fetishism," writes Rubin, "without thinking about the production of rubber" (Rubin 2011.292).

Substituting vinyl for rubber, in Rubin's construct, is a short step. She defines a greater connection between fetish and cultures of pleasure and power, writing,

[H]ow can we think of fetishism without the impact of cities, of certain streets and parks, of red-light districts and 'cheap amusements,' or the seductions of department-store counters, pile high with desirable and glamorous goods? To me, fetishism raises all sorts of issues concerning shifts in the manufacture of objects, the historical and social specificities of control and skin and social etiquette, or ambiguously experienced body invasions and minutely graduated hierarchies. If all of this complex social information is reduced to [...] the Oedipus complex or knowing or not knowing what one is supposed to know, I think something important has been lost. (Rubin 2011.292)

I link the fetish object (the vinyl record) to complex social informations, body invasions (through the physical, en fleshed response to music evidenced through dancing), and the seductions of inner-city sites (socio-sonic sites like discos, protests, bars, sex clubs and bathhouses).

The important role that vinyl records play in the history and evolution of music composition, production, and commodification in disco music and culture as an evolving voice of gay liberation, and the experiential and affective knowledges that emerge through touch and handling of the object, produce a kind of movement that works individually and collectively. Movement, not just in and of sound itself, but the movement of the needle vibrating in the groove while the vinyl record rotates on the turntable is, specifically, a point of interest in my research and artistic practice, and in my decision to produce my dissertation's audio intervention in vinyl format. More than simple reproduction of the sounds and music committed—no, etched—to the playing surface of the record, the needle is performing, with each play, a vibratory dance as it reads the two sides of the groove. It is this vibratory performance that translates, through frequencies and electrical signals, into what we hear when we listen to records. Each play is affected by the condition of the record's surface, the number of times the

needle has been used (and worn), and any alien materials, such as dust, that is affixed (even temporarily) to the vinyl.

The links—between sound, music, movement, vibration, pre-existing and ongoing material conditions, and listening and responding to the sound—are important as forms of internal relation. In Ludwig Wittgenstein's attempts to identify the relationship between language/symbols and reality, he writes, "[t]he gramophone record, the musical through, the score, the waves of sound, all stand to one another in that pictorial internal relation, which holds between language and the world. To all of them the logical structure is common. (Like the two youths, their two horses and their lilies in the story. They are all in a certain sense one.)" (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 4.014, 2016.40). Wittgenstein's entanglement of the philosophical with the mythological and the poetic strikes a chord, for me, in this beeswax. In this chord, I imagine hearing (and responding to) internal relations forming during the composition, arrangement, performance, recording, production, mastering, pressing, and vinyl playback of *Soft Subversions*. And it delights to think that this *beeswax* may, too, be listening in to the same queer frequencies in Wittgenstein that Jarman found irresistible.²¹

The vinyl record is not just an object of reproduction, it is an instrument in and of itself, as is the record turntable. Together, these instruments are, in the hands of a good (and true) DJ, limitless in their capabilities. As Bourriaud writes, "[t]he work of the DJ consists in conceiving

²¹ Derek Jarman's 1993 feature film, *Wittgenstein*, is loosely based on the life story and philosophical thinking of the philosopher. The film's subtle queer codes drew attention and praise from the Berlin International Film Festival and the festival's Teddy Award for films with LGBTQI topics. In his book, *Smiling in Slow Motion*, Jarman writes, "Saturday 20 [March] Drifted across to the NFT opening for *Wittgenstein*, very nicely done. A gorgeous teddy bear — the prize awarded to *Wittgenstein* — arrives from Berlin. HB walked me home across Waterloo Bridge in the cold" (Jarman 2011.324). Even in the gloom of his final months, Jarman typically finds something to perk up his day — in this case, a teddy bear that honours his cinematic accomplishment while also bearing a signifying wink to bear culture within the larger LGBTQI community.

linkages through which the works flow into each other, presenting at once a product, a tool, and a medium" (Bourriaud 2002.40). For example, "scratching" is the action of moving vinyl records back and forth on one of the two turntables that (along with a crossfader/mixer) comprise the basic DJ setup. This movement creates a scratching sound that corresponds to the rhythm of the record sounding on the other turntable. As a result of this technique, the phonograph record (and phonograph player aka turntable) are no long only playback devices, they attain instrument status (Weheliye 2005.88). This status, as instrument, can be put to work to expand the role of the DJ from dance floor animator to sonic educator (ibid). American DJ Raymond Roker suggests two main features of DJing: the archival and the sonic (Roker 1997.6). As Weheliye writes, "[Roker's] two main features [...] continue and reformulate what we have been referring to as the material and ephemeral or graphematic and affective" (2005.88).

I understand my vinyl (audio) intervention as a collaborative, activist method. The vinyl record documents collaborative processes that emerge through my roles as audio composer, arranger, and producer and the different roles of my research participants. Participant roles include spoken word sounds from interview recordings that risk the personal and are cited in audio works (or in statements that appear as text in the video work). Participant roles in the vinyl record also include specific statements developed for the audio works (such as Robert Bolton's written, performed, and recorded responses to my dissertation writings; and Jessica Karuhanga's recitation of her text that was print-published for AAN's PosterVirus project). The activist layers in the vinyl-record-as-method can be understood in the ways it represents a community response to risk in relation to biopolitical and neoliberal managements of and

investments in HIV/AIDS, the PrEP/U=U universe, sexual ecologies, art, artistic practice, AIDS and intersectionality and its risky representations.

There are other aspects to recording and the vinyl record. Brian Eno describes one of these features as the “detachable aspect” (Eno 2015b.128). “As soon as you record something,” writes Eno, “you make it available for any situation that has a record player” (ibid).

You take it out of the ambience and locale in which it was made, and it can be transposed into any situation [making] all music all present. So not only is the whole history of our music with us now, in some sense, on record, but the whole global musical culture is also available. (ibid)

This perspective makes clearer the ways that sound can initiate and activate corporeal dialectics. Sound’s vibrations move more than our cochlear sensory perceptors; they move every part of our individual bodies and the body politic. In the hands of DJs, the vinyl record becomes an activist tool: for information dissemination; to activate socio-sonic space and processes and practices of vibrotactility; to imagine the links and likely relations between disparate sonic sites as a *semionaut* (qua Bourriaud) who produces original pathways through signs and new cartographies of knowledge. The DJ listens to the movements on the dance floor and responds in a dynamic fashion, a fashion that in turn produces new possibilities for dance floor self-creation.

Bourriaud describes the DJ as a semionaut who “produces original pathways through signs [and] imagines the links, the likely relations between disparate sites” (Bourriaud 2002.18). DJing with vinyl records provides two modes of what Weheliye describes as “double consciousness” (2005.89). “On the one hand,” writes Weheliye, “the DJ matches up two different forms of sonic consciousness in his/her mix, and on the other hand, the audience and the DJ have to negotiate their expectation and rituals in the sonic space of a club” (ibid). For Weheliye, these

add up to a larger mix that combines DJs, audiences, musics, technologies, and public spaces through the sonic projection of temporality, both literally and more abstractly, since one of the paramount objectives of mixing is to synchronize the different beats per minute (BPM) of each track and the grooves of the vinyl (*ibid*). In this way, DJs can conceive of records as “raw sonic matter” (*ibid*). During a set, a DJ’s work consists of both proposing “a personal orbit through the musical universe (a playlist) and of connecting these elements in a certain order, paying attention to their sequence as well as to the construction of an atmosphere (working directly on the crowd of dancers or reacting to their movements)” (Bourriaud 2002.38).

Understanding risk in relationship to sonic objects—sound (and, in particular, vinyl records), language, time, listening, and the disco—is just part of the story of my research. Each of these objects has already-existing relationships with each other: time and music (disco) as a time-based media; language and time-based creativity (spoken word); and disco (music and culture) as a language, in and of itself, a language of resistance, community, and cross-cultural self-determination and liberation. When HIV/AIDS infected the storyline—and dance floors—in the early 1980s, the disco performed as a metric of the crisis and reached a fever pitch. Due to the size of its LGBTQI population and the lively communities that were supported there, clubs in New York City, like The Saint, Paradise Garage, and Better Days evidenced the greatest changes. As Tim Lawrence writes, “[d]uring 1982 dancers started to refer to the contagion that was killing disproportionate numbers of gay men as ‘Saint’s disease [...] alongside a more popular variation—‘the Saint Mark’s Baths disease’” (2016.327-328). Significantly, however, were the ways that the disco, and other subcultural locations of MSM sexual community,

transformed into sites of resistance and activism, a kind of metaphor for my dissertation's deployment of risk as harm reduction.

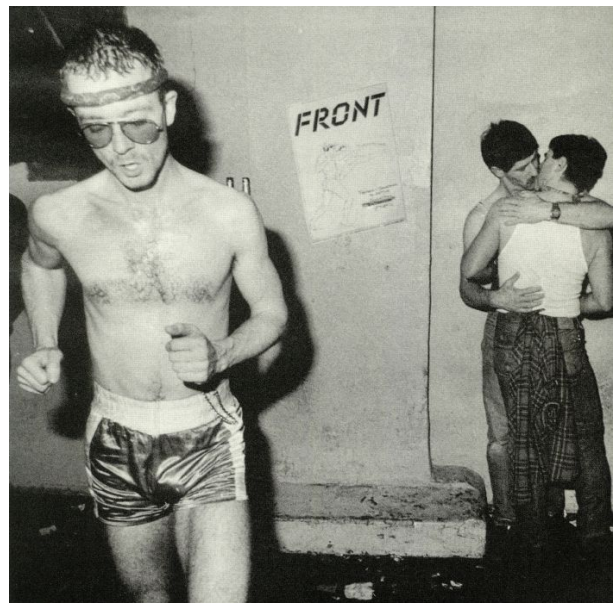
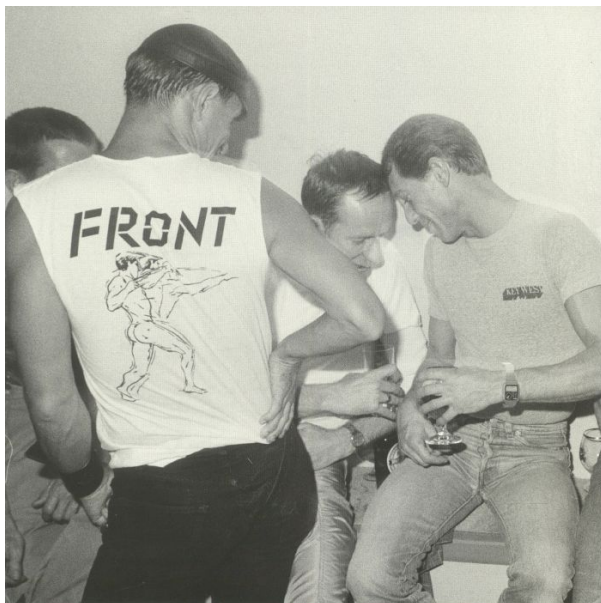
AIDS accentuated the way many men experienced time as fragmented, ephemeral, and urgent [and] many remained committed to the dance floor as a space of expression and community [and] celebrated gay identity as something positive, even during negative times. [Some individuals] wondered if the health crisis would boost dance-floor numbers [wherein] going out to find someone to trick with [became secondary to] going out to have a good time. (Lawrence 2016.436)

Lawrence outlines how The Saint became a battleground where those concerned with the escalating crisis clashed with those determined to “protect the rights of gay men to sexual freedom” (2016.434). Confronted with letters from some members who complained about attendees who were suspected of having AIDS, the owner argued that “pointing fingers and judging other people’s behaviour ‘is almost worse than the disease itself’” adding that the importance of maintaining community is key to ensuring that everyone will live (2016.435). Here is a vivid example of pushing back against oppression, especially homonormative voices within the LGBTQI community. My audio work in this dissertation recognizes the echoes of these voices in the current moment as HIV-positive men are chastised—especially online, in sexual networking channels (such as Grindr and Scruff), and in bathhouses—by their queer peers who claim HIV-negative status or being on Prep My audio work aims to draw marginalized voices into the foreground through dub production strategies, field recordings from gay bathhouses, and artist interview statements.

I aim to situate my dissertation audio works in dialogue with a number of radical MSM sex and AIDS-related musics from the 1970s and early 1980s that have recently re-emerged in subcultural music sectors, emergences that echo the sounds and movements of MSM socio-

sonic cultures and AIDS in its incubational and pre-treatment eras. Representations of the visual and the sonic in these recent reiterations are evidence of revitalized interests in radical MSM sex.

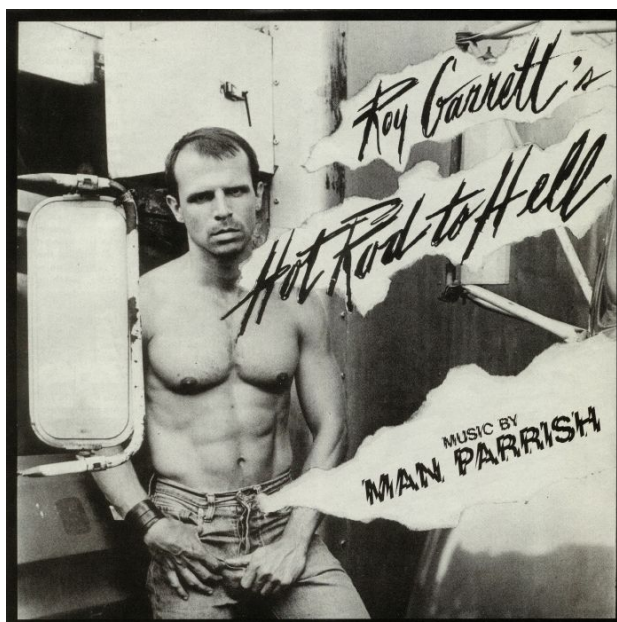
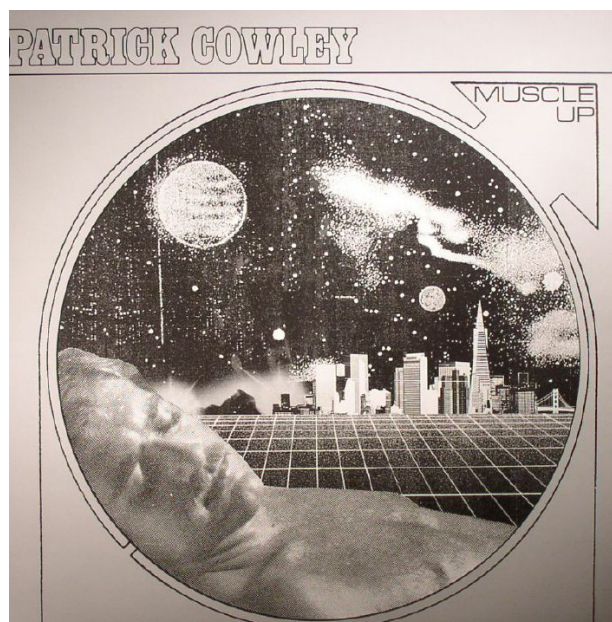
As the pre-treatment AIDS crisis increased, a siege mentality began to take hold and disco sounds came to signify what Lawrence describes as “a nostalgic moment when unprotected sex didn’t carry the treat of death,” even if its recycling through DJ set lists and music industry releases added force to the argument that venues, like The Saint, were trapped in sonic time (2016.437). Today, as the era of classic disco is revisited through DJ and audio production mechanisms like disco-edits and nu disco, many of the signifiers of pre-AIDS dance music are revived and celebrated, not insignificantly for the transparency of the sexual content and representation.



Klaus Stock Hausen, Boris Dlugosch, and various artists: Running Back Master Mix I (2018); Klaus Stock Hausen, Boris Dlugosch, and various artists: Running Back Master Mix II (2018).

A 2018 release, *Walter Gibbons Master mixes*, on the Sal soul Records label (an imprint that delivered some of the golden era’s critical hits), is jacketed with a full-colour photograph of a shirtless male torso that emphasizes the figure’s crotch, clad in the signature button-fly jeans

that were popularized in the 1970s by MSM. Concurrently, German label Running Back Records released two compilations of peak era rarities from the sexualized disco era—*Running Back Mastermix: Front Parts 1* and *2*—each featuring authentic photographs from back corners of the disco, men locked in passionate embrace, head bands and boxing shorts, button-fly jeans half-cocked and ready for action. From 2014 to 2019, San Francisco-based label, Dark Entries, has successfully issued three double-LP releases of archival music by gay-identified audio production pioneer, Patrick Cowley. These releases—*School Daze* (2014), *Muscle Up* (2015), *Afternooners* (2017), and *Mechanical Fantasy Box* (2019)—use queer euphemisms for sexual community and compile many of Cowley’s home studio demos, material that did not achieve final mix stage due to the artist’s untimely death from AIDS-related causes in 1983. The videos remain hard-to-find, but the sound of 1970s and early 1980s bareback porn has found new ears and imaginations in current vinyl culture.



Patrick Cowley: *Muscle Up* (2015); Roy Garrett (with Man Parrish): *Hot Rod to Hell* (2019)

The February 2019 vinyl release of Roy Garrett’s *Hot Rod to Hell: A 48-Song Cycle* (Dark Entries, DE240), restores Garrett’s 1982 cassette-only release of spoken word poetry set to a

haunting, atmospheric score by Man Parrish (the artist behind the legendary score to the Joe Gage-produced porn film, *Heatstroke* [1981], and the seminal hip-hop electro-disco smash, “Hip Hop, Be Bop [Don’t Stop]” in 1982). *Hot Rod* advances the uncensored musics conversation significantly. A Dark Entries Instagram account post reads: “Man Parrish [...] remembers, ‘Walking home dressed in chaps from the Mineshaft in the Meatpacking District you would see slabs of beef hang. And I remember one of Roy’s poems said ‘you can find me just hanging around on a meat hook’ and make love to me” (darkentriesrecords, 24 January 2019).

My audio intervention, *Soft Subversions*, expands on these darkroom discourses of disco and sex, and that which Patrick Moore describes as, “the sexual experimentation of gay men in the 1970s without the filter of AIDS as a series of individual actions and cultural creations that were liberating to some participants and destructive to others, influential in liberal popular culture and deeply threatening to conservatives” (2004.5). I use these sonic relationships—and the forms of knowing that sound, music, and listening can reveal—in my dissertation audio works (and the soundtrack to the video intervention). Statements drawn from interviews are used, in relationship to historical sonic narratives of social and sexual production, and field recordings (collected in cruising parks and bathhouses), to produce lively tensions and possibilities through new processes of new meaning-making.

In an era when music is commonly “free” (“stolen” is more accurate) and disposability is prevalent, the vinyl record represents a sound object. That is, the vinyl record is a solid, tangible, material thing. This tangibility also underscores my decision to choose vinyl as a methodological practice. As Sabine B. Vogel writes, “[f]or Theodor Adorno the meaning of the record lay not in

its function—at the time of its playing—as a surrogate for live music, but in the existence of the record itself as a ‘thing.’”²²

[It is] in the phonograph record as a thing that its potential significance—and also its aesthetic significance—resides [...] it is the first means of musical presentation that can be possessed as a thing. [...] Through the phonograph record, time gains a new approach to music. It is not the time in which music happens, nor is it the time which music monumentalizes by means of its ‘style.’ It is time as evanescence, enduring in mute music. If the ‘modernity’ of all mechanical instruments gives music an age-old appearance—as if, in the rigidity of its repetitions, it had existed for ever, having been submitted to the pitiless eternity of the clockwork—then the evanescence and recollection that is associated with the barrel organ as a mere sound in a compelling yet indeterminate way has become tangible and manifest through the gramophone records. (Adorno 1990.58)

This thingness resonates with temporal disruption and affect; it offers two sides to every story: distinct landscapes of sonic pleasure or disturbance, depending on the listener’s desire and perspective. The vinyl record—and its jacket and liner/insert—bridges the gap between materiality and music, giving the listener visual/textual elements to explore and consider while the sound and listening processes are engaged.²³ The vinyl record changed—and continues to change—the ways we relate to music, the ways we use music as an identity-forming tool, and the ways we put music to work in community, resistance, and struggles against normativity. The music industry reinvents formats for music consumption every decade or so, since the

²² Vogel inserts Adorno into her article on Swiss-born artist and musician, Christian Marclay, whose practice wrestles (in figurative and literal ways) with vinyl records and vinyl culture, appears in the May 1991 issue of *Artforum*. She notes that Marclay, “utilizes the vinyl disk not only to reproduce the musical information it contains but also to produce objects, installations, and new records [to] transcend the gap between materiality and music, between direct and indirect, and between ‘thingliness’ and immateriality. [...] Marclay’s oeuvre marks the location of a third factor between music and art, a site on which conventional uses of the record medium may be circumvented and new systems of relationships become possible” (Vogel 1991).

²³ Compact discs are often too small, in format, to engage with in similar ways: the font is too small to read with ease, the plastic (case and disc itself) too abundant, the sound too precise and often lacking the warmth of vinyl’s analogue body. And, I admit, I am one of those analogue sound lovers who commit to vinyl records and their inherent warmth of sonic reproduction versus the cold clarity of compact discs or the compromised sonic spectrum of mp3 files.

widespread use of digital audio—starting with compact disc (CD) format in the late 1980s—through to mp3 files and downloading culture. The vinyl record continues to push back on industrializations of commercial (and non-commercial) musics and is a vital location of expression for interdisciplinary artists working with sound where the (fetish) object itself becomes a mechanism of and for cultural production. And it is in Adorno's critique of time, in the phonograph record, that I am also interested — the letting go of music as a time-specific cultural event and the possibilities that records offer. That is, music that was once permanently attached to specific times and locations can now be accessed anytime, anywhere, and—importantly—in the privacy of home and/or headphones. But is in relationship to risk and the frameworks of queerness, HIV/AIDS, and the disco (as a vital location of celebration and struggle, and the important imaginary of the DJ) that underline my research, that the vinyl record elevates to heights of glory, ecstasy, influence, and aural pleasure.

I encourage you, the reader, to listen to the audio works. Listen in a focused way: listen to a particular instrument or section (like the rhythm section: percussion, beats, and bass); listen to the way that certain effects (reverb, delay, repetition) convey different spaces, times, and work together to speak about sex and AIDS and artistic practice; listen to the words, and contrasting words and sounds. What are kinds of images do you see when you are listening?

Listen again.

Chapter Three: Participants

In this chapter, I introduce and outline the participants and their practices in relation to my dissertation. Participants include artists, activists, and curators with personal and/or creative experience in the field of HIV/AIDS and/or MSM sex and/or radical or ludic or risky sex and/or art and artistic practice where risk exists. A starting point for my participant selection is AAN!'s Poster Virus project, which is discussed further below, and select artists who have participated in that project. From this beginning, I explored pathways that opened through discussion with these artists and other actors in the field of HIV/AIDS art and activism. Through different forms of disobedience, each participant creates new ways of making and, in turn, responding to questions of risk through processes of risking the personal, interacting with (ludic or radical or risky) sexual ecologies, and HIV/AIDS and its intersectionalities and risky representations. In this chapter, I listen to what the participants say on their own about risk. Drawing on experiential insights of race, gender, ableism, age, and class, my research participants not only risk the personal in responding to the four themes in my research (themes which emerged through interviews), they helped me to problematize my own ways of thinking, seeing, knowing, being, and listening to issues of AIDS and risk. Sound and music play an important role in this chapter — as tropes description and to reassert the ways that sound, music, and listening gird and guide my research, and drive my own arts practice.

Whether they were recruited for their role in Poster Virus or for artistic practices that engage notions of risk in bold strokes (like Alan Belcher and Simon Muscat), my interview participants represent an iconoclastic group that insist on critiquing or disobeying cherished beliefs or institutions: the very potent and risky power at the heart of making and responding to

art. In the collaborative settings of interviews, we created—together—new knowledge of art, sex, and risk, and revealed new questions and possibilities for future (risky) movements. This chapter contributes to my dissertation by exploring the key issues of risk in art and sex, art and artistic practice that involves risk (risky sexual content, HIV disclosure, living with HIV, and the ongoing role of risk-taking in artistic practice in general). This chapter includes two sections: 1) Participant Selection Rationale: Recruitment, Outreach, and Poster Virus; and 2) Participants.

A key point of the interviews is twofold: to gain access to inner workings and processes of artists from diverse racial, gendered, and economic backgrounds who work in diverse media, some of whom are living with HIV or whose lives have been touched by the crisis; and to problematize my own perspectives and creative representations through collaborative conversation and artistic interaction. The collaborative element is critical to my dissertation as a form of artistic interaction and productive exchange. Translating sexual connectivity, and the intimacies that are possible through artistic interrelation revealed many exciting, new insights.

The interviews and the different perspectives that emerged through them changed my thinking in five ways: 1) My relationship to HIV (for example, by deepening my understanding of living with HIV through the lens of individuals who tested positive at a younger age). 2) My sexual practices and pleasure pursuits were reinforced through creation of (new) kinship experiences with creative minds that also seek out the sex they really want and the ways creativity plays a role in that sex, sharing stories with MSM of different backgrounds who discover self-creation through anonymous and recreational sex, and through conversation with differently gendered individuals about the role of sex in life and creative practice. 3) Art and artistic practice and the different ways they shape people, both through making and responding to art. My own

experience and creative processes often shift when I interact with other artists — a shift that is more pronounced in collaborative situations and projects. 4) Talking about HIV/AIDS and sex is always a creative learning experience when it occurs between people living with HIV. 5) PrEP, U=U, and the new chronic become less reluctant objects when artists who engage with these conditions respond through creative practice and discourse.

Importantly, the interviews (and the work that came into focus through the conversations) impacted, deepened, and expanded my understandings of HIV/AIDS, risk as a productive object, and the ways that art challenges normative and preinvented worlds. The actual process of the interviews and certain information transformed my two creative interventions. The interviews shaped the creative outcome of the project through form and content.

Participant Selection Rationale: Recruitment, Outreach, and Poster Virus

The primary method of data collection for this project was through in-depth qualitative interviews with artists, activists, and curators. Purposeful sampling to recruit a spectrum of interviewees took place as it became clear that a salient sampling criterion—even outside of artist circles—is social class. Other criteria included sexual orientation, gender, race, and HIV status (creating space for both HIV-positive and HIV-negative perspectives). Interviewees were recruited for the ways their creative practices interrogate and respond to one or more of the following: sex, orientation, HIV/AIDS, and/or measure of queerness (as a political position); evidence of risk in practice-oriented processes and material production; and their practice-based relationship(s) to Toronto. A number of the artists/curators were selected because of their

involvement with AIDS Action Now!'s (AAN) Poster Virus project (developed collaboratively by artists and activists in response to HIV/AIDS) and the ways that that project aligns with my research into artistic responses to HIV/AIDS in relationship to Toronto, and the potential benefits (and dangers) of art, sex, and risk messaging at a street level. Importantly, a number of the interviewees entangle their creative practices with pedagogy and research, activating individual a/r/tographies and participant comprehensive and sensory possibilities. As iconoclasts, each interviewee brought (risky) personal insights to questions and processes of criticizing or attacking cherished beliefs or institutions in creative and/or playful ways.²⁴

²⁴ Absent from my group of participants are some Toronto artists whose practices engage with and respond to sex, risk, (sometimes) HIV, and so-called pervy content in creative ways. These artists—including (though not limited to) Thirza Cuthand, Andy Fabo, Mike Hoolboom, Terence Koh, Bruce la Bruce, and Kelly McCray—represent the expected names in this kind of research. An important theme in my dissertation, however, is the unexpected — a feature that I position and protect in my exploration of risk. Moreover, early on I established parameters around age, gender, and race: as a queer-identified white male artist living and aging with HIV, I wanted to expand my horizons, understandings, and experiential knowledge of AIDS through discourse with artists who tested positive for the virus at an earlier age; I wanted to hear non-white perspectives and differently gendered points of view instead of reviewing many of the names and practices that already receive attention. I wanted to dig in different, unexpected directions to examine risk, art, queer sex, and AIDS. La Bruce, Fabo, McCray, and Hoolboom are older and white — and while they produce good and often important work, they don't take risks in the ways I write about. I selected artists who I perceive as taking risks in their creative practice in distinctive ways. I do not always associate risk with "pervy" which is a link that many scholars make. I did not want to include la Bruce, who is definitely at the top of the perv curve, because I perceive his work more as shock tactic instead of risky. As Marc Bolan sang in "Shock Rock," "If you know how to rock/You don't have to shock" (Bolan/T. Rex 1973). La Bruce's practice is riddled with vivid (and often) violent sexual, post-punk content, but often in money-spinning ways (for example, his line of perfume or his opera staging and design work). Hustlers and porn stars are objectified in la Bruce's work in ways that are less about risk and more about celebrity. Sex work is a respectable trade, not celebrity or shock fodder where identity plays a critical role rather than the sex itself. As Dean writes, "making actions especially visible can work against, rather than in the service of, disciplinary power by rendering identities increasingly irrelevant. Insofar as pornography, whether written or filmed, excels at making actions visible, it thereby generates possibilities for movement that loosen the bonds of identity" (Dean 2014.436). Like AA Bronson, la Bruce has evolved into a kind of branding artist instead of a producer of work where viewers can find new ways of thinking for or finding themselves. "The struggle with art," writes Ono, "became about the concept of whether you were stating your ego through your work or creating an environment where other people can be creative as well" (Ono 2005.41). Though pornography is an important thread in my research when it is organized in documentary ways, and la Bruce explores that theme in his practice (however fictionalized and fantasy-based), I am more intrigued by the forms and expressions of the pornographic that are conveyed in the practices of Alan Belcher, Shan Kelley, Simon Muscat, and Jessica Whitbread. Paul Morris's method of documentary porn-making with Treasure Island Media hits the nail on the head: put horny HIV-positive men in a room and turn on the cameras. Another problematic in research about art, artists, and HIV/AIDS is arts practice-led research itself and the resistances that exist within the arts and AIDS community in Toronto. Toronto-based Mi'kmaq/Acadian artist and men's sexual health activist Mikiki, asks "Why are you treating your

Poster Virus was initiated in 2011 by AAN to respond to the new forms of AIDS-phobia, discrimination, and inequality that continued to emerge after 30 years of the AIDS pandemic and crisis, including the increasing criminalization of people living with HIV. Poster Virus responded to cuts to municipal funding for essential services to address HIV, Hepatitis C (HepC), and syphilis; and the climate of fear and austerity that is increasing across Canada as a form of health inequality. Poster Virus recognized the ways that art and activism reinvigorate responses to HIV and AIDS. The posters aimed to address important issues facing the lives of people living with HIV and/or who are co-infected with HIV and HepC, and activated conversations about sexual rights, harm reduction, criminalization, and the need for political action to address the overall, ongoing crisis. Through Poster Virus, AAN merged the worlds of art and activism to intentionally evoke the history of creative responses to HIV/AIDS. This evocation of the history of AIDS art makes a direct reference to the work of street poster-oriented activism in the 1980s and 1990s.

The Poster Virus project updated the ways that AIDS is represented — beyond frameworks of testing, tracking, containment, and criminalization. Ted Kerr writes, “[a]s [series curators, Alexander McClelland and Jessica Whitbread] saw it, most stories about the epidemic were told through a lens of public health — this way of looking positioned people living with HIV as problems that needed to be identified (through testing), tracked (through treatment) and

research subjects like children?” (Mikiki 2018, unpaginated). I share this inquiring perspective with Mikiki through my own experiences with and active participation in concepts and practices of AIDS-related art therapy where processes of infantilization of making and responding to art commonly overrun artistic practice and art itself. One of the biggest problems Mikiki has with research and community programs for people living with HIV who use arts methods is that “there is rarely any connection to working artists, conversations about artistic labour, and cultural production. [...] The infantilization inherent in making decisions, that program participants and research subjects can be requested to recite our trauma histories on command but that an unproven method of artistic engagement might be unbearable emotionally is insulting and frankly unwarranted” (ibid).

contained (through unnecessary HIV-specific laws)” (Kerr 2016). Crucially, this public art initiative has sparked discussions—around nostalgia (particularly the way AIDS was originally portrayed and commodified in the earlier years of the crisis versus the current moment), gender (producing more concerted efforts to highlight positive women), and autonomy—in communities in the cities where posters have been wheat pasted. “These types of intimate and innovat[ive] conversations,” writes Kerr, “are something Whitbread and McClelland long yearned for — and that they’ve made happen with the help of friends and peers” (ibid).

McClelland and Whitbread write,

We are under pressure. Our viral loads are overloaded. The response to AIDS is becoming destabilized. We are faltering, becoming complacent, giving up and giving in. The law is creeping further and further in. Our bodies are over-medicalized. And our lives are under-supported. We are not the public that “Public Health” cares about. (McClelland 2012)

In this way, participation in the Poster Virus project becomes a lens through which I made some interview participant selections: the poster work itself, what it brings to the conversation and/or can be put to work as a starting point for discussion, and an artist’s willingness to be visible and active in the field of HIV/AIDS and, in some cases, explicit sexual messaging. As well, it helps to hold the focus on Toronto. While a number of the artists have relocated or tend toward more nomadic existences, approximately half of the interviewees share a connection to Toronto through Poster Virus. Importantly, some Poster Virus-related artists both include and transcend the project. For example, Karuhanga’s work for Poster Virus transcends that project through reiteration of her poster’s text component and new contextualization in my audio work, “Harm (Reduction Mix).” Whitbread expands and transcends her practice of risking the personal, as represented in her posters *Fuck Positive Women* and *AIDS Famous*, to address issues inherent in

those messages by speaking to controversial (and impossible) issues of safe space and being an HIV-positive parent.

Some interviews took place in artist studios in an effort to create a space of ease and offer a focus on specific art works that respond to HIV/AIDS or sex as a point of radicalism. Other interviews took place via Skype as a way to engage with artists who have existing relationships with Toronto but currently live elsewhere.

Toronto figured into my selection process for a number of reasons. Toronto is the site of my queer life, my seroconversion to HIV-positive (I often personally and creatively reflect on the temporality of that seroconversion in relation to the larger trajectory of AIDS in Toronto), and my artistic life is situated in Toronto, including collaborations with other HIV-positive artists before and after I tested positive for the virus. Toronto is a significant site of artistic production that responds to HIV/AIDS and is a hub of AIDS activism that actively reflects on AIDS intersections. The city itself is an urban site of diverse cultures and sexual practices and has one of the world's largest MSM communities in the world. In the Introduction, I interpreted historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and art as a kind of roadmap to radical, ludic, and risky sexual ecologies and suggested that the same roadmap can be used as a starting point for understanding risky MSM sexual practices and cultures in Toronto. Lastly, Preciado, his inscription in my copy of *An Apartment On Uranus*, and the ways I use it in this work take flight from Toronto's iconic LGBTQI bookstore, Glad Day.

Participants

Alan Belcher

A Toronto-based visual artist whose conceptual practice is decidedly multi-layered, and object orientated. He has been recognized in the past as an originator of a tactile fusion of photography and object-making. A transparency of vision and simplicity of fabrication with a concentrated regard for materials remain hallmarks of his serial productions. Belcher is known for a directness and a sharp simplicity when approaching difficult subject matter. A sense of humour and a reverence for a Pop sensibility, as well as a hands-on approach, invade much of his work. (artist's website)

Alan Belcher has been making artwork that engages with risk in both subtle and obvious ways for three decades. He was a member of the Homogenous Collective, a fluctuating group of queer Toronto artists who exhibited together and published a small series of highly sought-after catalogue/bookwork's documenting vivid and visceral homosexual perspectives from 1989 through 1993. Belcher's recent body of painting, on the topic of oil, involves silhouetted images of derricks painted on pieced-together tarps. Reviewing Belcher's 2018 exhibition, *Giant*, at Imak Gallery (New York City), Time Out described the paintings as, "Striking oil, as a metaphor for an artist's dream of success" (Belcher 2018). I first encountered Belcher's work in the exhibition, *Alan Belcher: Photos, Sculpture, Objects 1983-1988* (curator: Tom Folland), at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, spring 1989. In the exhibition's accompanying catalogue essay, "Play This Essay Loud," Rosetta Brooks writes,

Noise is a [sic] ubiquitous presence, though, surprisingly, it is scarcely ever mentioned in the context of any art form. [...] Noise is what keeps us alive and creates the scenario for transformation, for revolution. To suppress noise is to inhibit growth. The discordant voices of the Civil Rights movement and the loud din of rock 'n' roll in the 1950s are handy reminders that noise signifies change. [...] Belcher's art is LOUD. Loud, because the noise of contemporary culture resonates through all his work. And it's not just that the images he uses are fragments of familiar artefacts

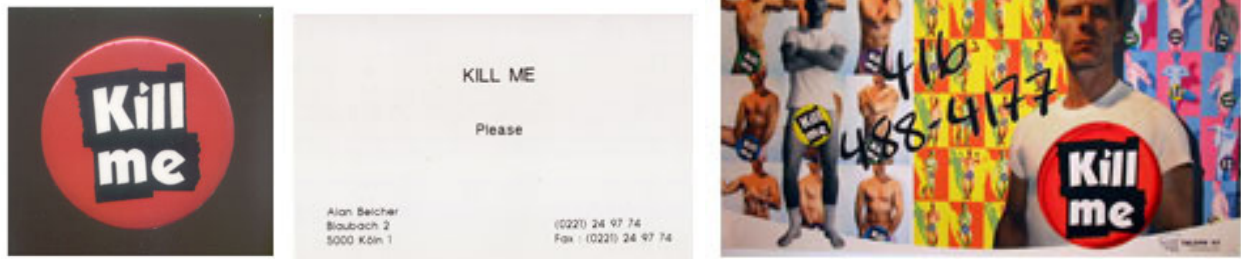
that we recognize from our everyday surroundings; it's that they suggest their fullness. They speak of all that these images have come to mean to us in a culture of excess. [...] Belcher's art is one of collision, collusion and bricolage—a self-conscious insistence on exploring all the sounds, images and messages that are served up to us daily as reality. [...] Belcher takes hardware ranging from that of the advertising agency to that of the construction site, juxtaposing unlikely elements with images and artefacts to assault our conventional preconceptions of what art is. (Brooks 1989.13-14)

Brooks's usages of sonic, erotic, tension, and transformational descriptors—aural, becoming, discord, DJs, juxtaposition, noise, rhythm, sensuality, sound, and volume—are significant in relationship to the ways that sound, music, listening, DJ practice (that Bourriaud describes as “semionaut,” 2002.18), risk, and erotic power are put to work in *Risky Beeswax*, drawing Belcher's practice into sharp focus with my research interests.²⁵ Two years later, I had the opportunity to gain greater familiarity with Belcher's work through the private collection of Robert Flack, a Toronto-based artist who was my friend and collaborator. In the final years of his life (1957-1993), Flack furiously collected an impressive archive of artist works (many through the process of trading his own works) and this included a number of Belcher's multi-media pieces featuring glossy women's and fashion magazines nailed to wooden boards.

From 1992 through 1997, Belcher created a body of work titled *Kill Me*, a volume of interdisciplinary works—including buttons, business cards, collage, transit advertising, and hoarding posters—that tempt fate (literally and figuratively). *Kill Me* represents a kind of

²⁵ In *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World*, Nicolas Bourriaud writes, “The activities of DJs, Web surfers, and postproduction artists imply a similar configuration of knowledge, which is characterized by the invention of paths through culture. All three are ‘semionauts’ who produce original pathways through signs. [...] The ‘semionaut’ imagines the links, the likely relations between disparate sites [where] to listen to records becomes work in itself, which diminishes the dividing line between reception and practice, producing new cartographies of knowledge. This recycling of sounds, images, and forms, implies incessant navigation within the meanderings of cultural history, navigation which itself becomes the subject of artistic practice” (2002.18).

“ground zero” in relationship to this research on risk. In the print media, transit, billboard, and poster components, the artist is prominently featured in near-nakedness, posing provocatively (and admittedly pornographically) while the headline, “Kill Me,” is conspicuously front-and-centre alongside his actual home telephone number. The button (1997), a bright red large format pin with bold white type set on a black slash, proclaims “Kill Me,” and the risky character of this object—and message—have only increased with time. To wear this art object in public space is to take risks. The business card (1992), an iconic hybrid of meanings and contexts, bears the title statement with a simple cut-line, “Please.” In 1997, Toronto’s Art Metropole commissioned Belcher to produce a billboard for the organization’s *Billboards by Artists* series. Belcher’s 10-sheet billboard was intended for display on a downtown Toronto billboard but was not exhibited outdoors due to a controversial decision by Advertising Standards Canada and Mediacom.



Alan Belcher: *Kill Me* button (1997), business card (1992), Art Metropole billboard (1997)

Belcher’s insistence on running risks—as an artist, as a gay-identified and sexual man—seduces me in many ways. The unapologetic boldness of his cultural mash-ups, materially and in relationship to semiotics and messaging, creates visceral tensions. The ways he implicates sound and music in many of his works are also important.

Belcher advances his practice without fear. His work continues to brave new artistic and topic territories. And he takes each step knowing full well the risks involved. Many of his comments and stories are featured, as textures and sonicotextualities, in *Soft Subversions*.

Anthea Black and Jessica Whitbread

Black and Whitbread work independently and together as artist-activists in the HIV/AIDS field. Importantly, they are co-publishers of *The HIV Howler: Transmitting Art and Activism*, a semi-regular broadsheet that launched during the XXII International AIDS Conference (Amsterdam), and gathers art and writing by people living with HIV. Apart from the shared poetics of Black and Whitbread, I outline them together because a) I interviewed them together, b) they are lovers, and c) *The HIV Howler* (which is explored further in this sub-section). As outlined in the Recruitment and Outreach section (above), recruitment of participants is organized, in part, around AAN's poster virus initiative and street campaign, which was co-curated by Whitbread. In this way, the work of Black and Whitbread represents a significant methodological, creative framework in this *beeswax*.

Anthea Black is a Canadian artist, activist, writer, and cultural worker; she is also a faculty member at the California College of the Arts. Her studio work takes the form of prints, publications, drawing, textiles, video, and performance to address feminist and queer histories, collaboration, materiality, and archives. She is co-editor of *Handbook: Supporting Queer and Trans Students in Art and Design Education* (2018, with Shamina Cherawala), a collaborative intervention in art and design pedagogy. *Handbook* offers educators a radical rethink on how to work with queer and transgender students on their path to becoming artists and designers, from the first day of school through to seminars, studio classes, and critiques. Drawing directly from student experiences, *Handbook* aims to help faculty of all orientations to bring equitable teaching practices and queer curricula into art and design classes. Black is the designer of *The HIV Howler*.

In an interview with *CBC Queeries*, a weekly column by CBC arts producer Peter Knegt that queries LGBTQI art, culture, and/or identity through personal lenses, Black and Whitbread explain that *The HIV Howler* started with a discussion “about their mutual dream of creating an artist-driven project that ‘did not stem from (or rely-upon service organizations or policy initiatives’ that attempt to structure the lives of HIV-positive people” in their bed (Knegt 2018).

The *HIV Howler* editorial statement states,

We wanted this critical and emotional impulse to begin with us, our friends and our experiences together. The name [*The HIV Howler*] riffs on the idea of the town crier — the figure who spreads the news publicly through the streets. The Howler is also the person who will not shut up, who discloses too much. Where artists, writers and activists who speak ‘too loudly’ are seen as disruptive, we see ourselves and *The Howler* as a recognition that cultural criticism and AIDS activism are endurance practices, and that we — people living with AIDS, poz and negative, targeted and left behind — will not be silent. (Anthea Black and Jessica Whitbread with *The HIV Howler* editorial advisory, 2018)

At the public launch of *The HIV Howler*, in November 2018, at Art Metropole, Black notes,

We wanted to think about how the paper could act as a loosely curated forum that could assemble many different overlapping dialogues, artistic practices, activist responses and bring them all into one context together. And also to think about what our role as publishes could be to articulate a stance that we wanted to publish the work of HIV-positive artists only and really create a very concentrated format for that dialogue to take place. [We wanted] poz voices brought to the front, rather than added as a sort of tokenistic inclusion or marginalized within a bigger conversation that might be also encompassing people who commentate on AIDS from a position of not necessarily living with the virus. [W]e wanted to firmly establish that the voice of the paper was about the voices of poz people. (Anthea Black)

From this crossroads of creative, curatorial, and archival production, Black’s work ideally plugs into my beeswax by performing a number of tasks, primarily risk-taking through independent

publishing activity that features voices of HIV-positive people who occupy the margins through their perspectives, actions, and choices (sexual, artistic, ludic).

Jessica Whitbread is a queer artist and activist living with HIV. She is the mother of twins. Whitbread's ongoing work at the forefront of HIV/AIDS art and activism begins with interrogations of sex and pleasure and has evolved to highlight changing narratives about women living with HIV (Positive Women) and the challenges of birthing and mothering. Importantly, her participation in sexual community infuses her voice with experiential knowledge about sex, pleasure, party — and the ways these objects entangle in critical and productive ways in relationship to changing the HIV/AIDS landscape.



Jessica Whitbread, details from *Space Date* (2012)

In her series of performative photographs, *Space Date*, Whitbread (in collaboration with artist Morgan M. Page) offers vital commentary on and interrogation of the intersection of the safer sex codex—or safer sex industrial complex (artist website)—the criminalization of HIV non-disclosure, and queer women's sexualities. *Space Date* represents two human figures interacting, through a sequence of images, in playful, romantic ways, as any typical couple on a date, with the exception that they are each fully contained in space suits. In one instance, the couple are represented in the act of cunilingus/fellatio (the gender of the subjects are not disclosed due to the space suit coverings). In this particular work, Whitbread comments on the pornographic and the ways pornography is often erased or covered over (like the black bars and

blocks that were increasingly imposed on queer genitalia in pornographic publications in the late 1980s and early 1990s). *Space Date* was initiated with a performance, "Picnic," at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) as an extension of Whitbread's poster virus collaboration with Onya Hogan-Finlay, "I Don't Need to Wear a Space Suit to Fuck You!"



details from *Intervention: The HIV Howler*, SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art, Montréal (2019); photo credit: Clara Lacasse

A recent exhibition by Black and Whitbread, *Intervention: The HIV Howler*, at SBC Gallery of Contemporary Art (Montréal), interrogates the role of art and activism in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Black worked on the exhibition placement and production, and Whitbread managed the community event and panel discussion. On her active role in co-publishing *The HIV Howler*, Whitbread notes,

It was an amazing process of trying to reach as far as we could to engage as many diverse artists about some of the challenges that were incredible were really thinking about HIV art and risk, what it looks like in different places, spaces and communities. What does it look like in Uganda? What does it look like in Brazil? What does it look like in Ukraine? Amsterdam? New York City?" (Knegt 2018)

Intervention puts gallery space to work in interactive and activist ways, expanding on Whitbread and Black's goal of transmitting art and activism through grassroots HIV art and cultural production. In her review of *Intervention*, Sarah Nesbitt writes,

The newspaper takes its position in the gallery amid architectural, archival, and diagrammatic elements [...] Partway through the long side of the inverted L-shaped space sits a rectangular, low-lying plinth painted a medium bluish-grey holding multiple stacks of the latest edition of *The HIV Howler*, freshly printed and mostly still fastened together. [...] In the far left corner, disassembled pages are collaged together; pastel red, blue, green, and purple distinguish the editions. From a distance, the sheets take on the aesthetic of wheat-pasted posters – an appropriate formal nod to Whitbread's work with Poster Virus [AAN]. As I moved closer, my eyes drifted over the paper's bylines, which began looping together at my discretion like found poetry: Tiger Blood, Dead Flowers, When Do I Tell Her, Now. Corresponding to the publication's formal adoption of the daily newspaper, the intervention's installation mimics urban codes related to print media: the newspaper kiosk with rows of papers neatly displayed, the hopeful and/or burdensome bound stacks waiting to be opened and sold, posters pasted obsessively on walls "howling" to anyone who will listen. (Nesbitt 2019)²⁶

Black and Whitbread, along with their howling partners on the newspaper's editorial advisory committee, create important temporal and spatial messagings in the field of HIV/AIDS that provide necessary venues for HIV-positive voices that require investment from its audience — whether that audience is in a gallery, on the street, or in private space with the newspaper in hand. This form of investment marks a significant push against the biopolitical and neoliberal investments (and managements) of HIV/AIDS.

²⁶ It is important to note that AAN's poster virus project and the "aesthetic of wheat-pasted posters," represents both Whitbread's curatorial and artistic vision and Black's past practice creating screen-printed wallpapers for public spaces.

Faizal Deen

Faizal Deen is a queer-identified poet and writer who was born in Georgetown, Guyana, in 1968 and arrived in Canada in 1977. In 2000, Deen published what became the first LGBTQI poetry collection to represent people from Guyana, *Land Without Chocolate: A Memoir* (Wolsak and Wynn). His poetry seeks to address the ways that the cultural production of Caribbean populations in Canada, and poetry in particular, encourages us to rethink existing notions of diasporic identity, and Caribbean queer Islamic identities in the post-9/11 era. In 2016, Deen published *The Greatest Films*, a long poem that addresses the imaginations of cultural hybridity as they are shaped through passages and movement between real and imagined homelands and host lands. In this poetic narrative, Deen edits language from twentieth century cinema and music that signifies LGBTQI socio-sonic landscapes and audiotopias. Deen, who identifies HIV-positive, insists that poetry challenges the academy even as it is studied within institutional walls — that is, poetry presents institutional risks. Deen's preoccupation with *clearing the table* and *pushing it all away* emerges through study of the work of black Jamaican feminist, Sylvia Wynter, and imagining the possibilities that the forms of intellectual and epistemological disobedience that Wynter encourages.

Deen describes his interrogation of Wynter's writing, saying "I have been working with queer applications of Wynter's work for many years" (Deen, interview).

I have been trying to find entry points into the material, into the thinking, into the formation of Caribbean histories of sexuality that are related to, and tied to, Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and all the work that is being done in the invention of queer studies in Western spaces. In plotting the ways in which all the resistances are related—and they are all related through the conjuncture of colonialism and imperialism because it is those very histories of sexuality that Foucault is dismantling or rupturing in Volume One, which is the most read of the three volumes in the *History of*

Sexuality. Those histories have been replicated vis-à-vis the implementation of colonial systems, legal systems, moral systems, in statutes, in law, in police morality; the same Victorian statutes that led to the times when homosexuality is invented. (Deen, interview)

Deen also describes the ways that Wynter asks us to clear the table of materials and ideas constructed on notions of Man and, in their place, imagine and make real a world where it is the figure of the human that centres the narrative. Through Wynter, Deen imagines new, hybridized languages of critical thinking where poetry, sound, and music are integral, and developing questions from these emergent languages may hold the key to the changes that must take place in order for the human species to not simply evolve in more meaningful, fruitful ways, but to survive. This describes the shared space of diversity where queer people, people of colour, people who are differently abled and who live with chronic illness, like cancer and HIV/AIDS coexist.

Deen and I animatedly recollected stories of time travelling the disco, the power of the DJ, and the drugs we ingested to draw out ludic time in real time spaces; and we often returned—like a coda in music—to *pushing back* and *pushing away*, and poetry and music as emergent critical languages, the potential risks to institutional space(s) that poetry and sound-music present, and the urgent need for rethinking—and expressing—the experiential complexities of diversity, inclusion, and living with HIV/AIDS and its intersectionalities in institutional settings. Moreover, we share notes on the assimilationist institutional practices — as once radical forms of cultural production are tamed and sanitized for academic consideration and consumption. Deen acknowledges the importance of understanding that what diversity does can also be understood as what diversity obscures.

Deen puts the disco to work in his writing as subject, object, and metaphor; imagining the disco as “the unspeakable mystery” (2008.156), a mass of bodies in a kind of carnivalesque space, in a kind of “over-turning” (interview), a space that interrogates the kinds of spaces that we journey through, that we negotiate, that we live in, in order to survive economically, socially, spiritually. Deen’s poetic backrooms and outdoor discos are the locations of constellations of blowjobs and dirty knees. In the interview, we share interest in this space—and culture—as the site of ritual and celebration, and raising collective energies: a form of queer temple. Disco is present in *The Greatest Films*, as well as in his three poems in the anthology, *Our Caribbean* (2008). Deen understands disco as representing a collective force of bodies in celebration, in libation, in drunkenness, in drugs, in laughter, in intelligence, in sharing, and in community building. Disco represents, for Deen, an oppositional collective space to the kinds of politics that really reflect a certain kind of optimism around who and what constitutes man/human identity.

His poetry seeks to problematize the movement of some of the terminology that we use in Western spaces, particularly when he is in a Eurowestern space, which he understands he is of, as much as he is of the Caribbean, Guyanese, Trinidadian, and Jamaican spaces that he claims as his Caribbean spaces, while the meaning of those kinds of collective spaces of the disco shift. The meanings of these shifts depend, for Deen, on the generation, the space, and the political and social gains attached to those generational shifts. This shifting time/space is experience through disco (music, culture) where the release of eroticism mixes with performances of community building and forms of community system where alliances are built and, at the same time, transgress certain racial, economic, and geographical lines. He understands there was a period of time where and connections to more militant responses to homophobia were in

response to what it means to preserve spaces of beauty. “What is celebrated or condemned as a collection of vulgar bodies,” he says, “is about the politics of beauty” (interview).

The discos / Will take you, spilling out / Of your jeans / Into the coming freedom [...] Though your freedom / Will be different, you will carry / That history of dance with you / To the whiteness of him who will spill you / Out of your jeans into those spinning / Discos of riotous night. (Deen 2008.153)

“The meanings of the shift depend on the generation, on the space, depend on political and social gains attached to generational shifts,” Deen says. “I think the principle of release of eroticism within which we perform the work of community-building, where we perform the work of community system, [are] where we build alliances at a time that transgress certain racial, economic, geographic lines” (Deen, interview).

Onya Hogan-Finlay



Onya Hogan-Finlay: *Hankie* [2010]; detail from *Lez-Con* (2012)

Onya Hogan-Finlay is a Canadian-born curator and interdisciplinary artist currently based in Halifax and Los Angeles. Her drawings, artist multiples, and collaborative works activate participation through site-specific installation and social practices. In response to LGBTQI archives, Hogan-Finlay has organized exhibitions and projects that reimagine and reveal

feminist iconographies and minor histories (above). She co-founded an exhibition of artist's books, zines, and independent publications in the MOBILIVRE-BOOKMOBILE project that toured North America in an Airstream trailer from 2001 to 2005. C Magaine's Amish Morrel notes:

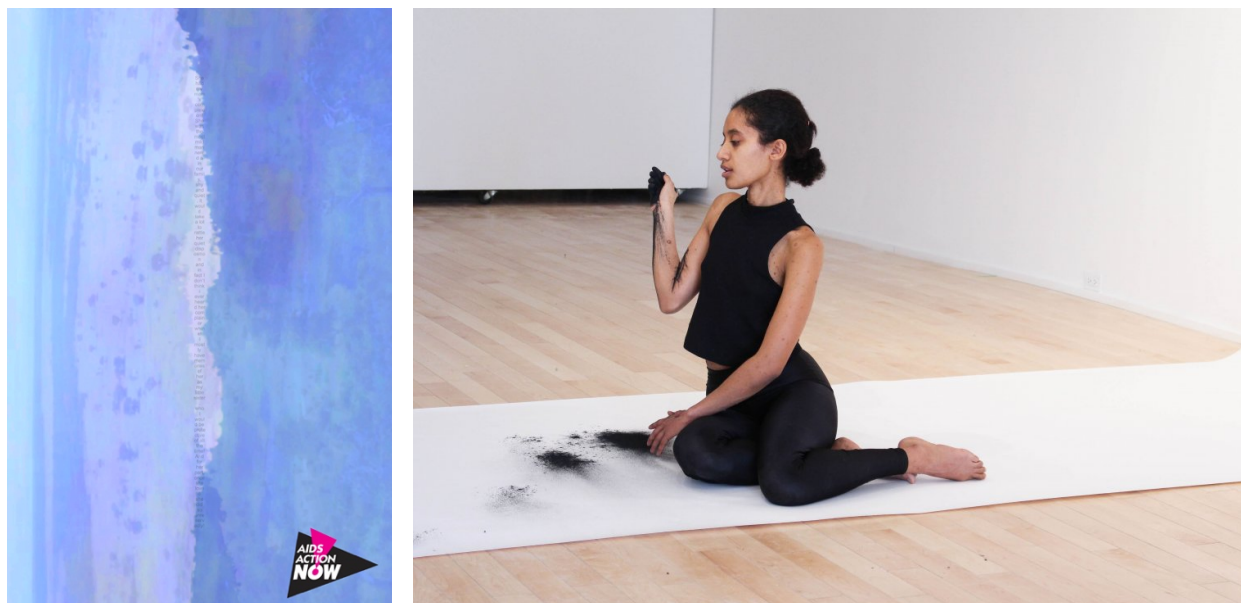
Hogan-Finlay [...] inserts a queer presence into the rural landscape through her drawing practice. Her work, however, contrasts 60s and 70s feminisms, which attempted to describe a universal experience of women through the alignment of their bodies with nature, primarily through reproduction. [The artist's] centrefold [produced for the issue] is irreverently and ecstatically engaged with back-to-nature feminist imagery and recognizable Canadian icons. (Morrel 2009)

In 2010, Hogan-Finlay produced a series of screen-printed Hankies (distributed by Art Metropole). This multiple features a design that "cleverly intertwines codes and visual metaphors for a moment's contemplation or discreet communication" (Art Metropole). In 2012, Hogan-Finlay presented *Lez-Con*, an exhibition of archival materials at The Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA). That same year, she collaborated with Kim Kelly on a mobile installation, *A/V Steam*, an interactive audio/visual, chai-yok steam spa in a U-Haul truck. *A/V Steam* included a soundtrack by Tara Jane O'Neill and projection video featuring footage compiled from the VHS collections of the June Mazer Lesbian Archives (Los Angeles) and from videos sourced online. Hogan-Finlay's contribution, in 2012, to AAN's Poster Virus series/campaign was inspired by Sheila De Bretteville's 1974 "Women in Design Conference" poster and features the late Sally Ride, an American physicist and astronaut.

Hogan-Finlay's work with sound and her membership in the music group, Lesbians on Ecstasy, establishes a bridge that connects us, where shared knowledge of sound—as a method of movement—can move freely and be collaboratively understood and activated.

Jessica Karuhanga

Blackness precedes all my other marks and I have no choice in this. I can never be just a person concerned with form. I'll always be that black woman appearing to be concerned with form. —Jessica Karuhanga



Jessica Karuhanga: poster virus (2016); detail from FADO performance (2014)

Jessica Karuhanga is a Toronto-based artist working in drawing, video, movement, and performance (the latter a practice that she arrived at through sculpture and material play). Her work has been presented at galleries, museums, and artist-run centres including The Royal Conservatory, the Art Gallery of Ontario, OCAD University, Videofag, and London's Goldsmiths. In 2014, Karuhanga was featured in the FADO Performance Art Centre's "Emerging Artist Series" (7th AIDS International Festival of Performance Art). In this setting, Karuhanga's residency, *howyoufeel*, enacted a series of movements and explored touch through virtual filters, zooms, and mediations. "How are you moved when I move? Do I leave a mark? Is the response lodged in the exhale of your gaze? Does it feel the same when I am touching me vs. you touching me? Am I invested in these platforms as a locus or moment of connection? This series is a loos eyelash is a hot breath impressed upon cold glass" (Karuhanga).

In an interview with Luther Konadu (*Public Parking Journal*, 2016), Karuhanga describes her creative practice as, “mostly intuitive” (Konadu 2016).

There is no pedagogy formally influencing or framing my practice. Some folks make this assumption because of how well I articulate myself. I resist containers or the notion that some institution produced me. You don’t get to claim me especially when you can’t hold space for my blackness. I just made it my job to know what was up. I had an incessant thirst. To read. To witness. To learn. To dig. It really was a kind of digging because I wasn’t seeing myself reflected. (Karuhanga, speaking with Konadu 2016)

Karuhanga believes each iteration of a performance—and art experience or encounter—is not the same as the one before — a belief that is not limited or specific to ephemeral works, including painting, sculpture, books, albums, or films — that is, each iteration, each encounter is, through repetition, different. As Henriques writes on repetition in music production (specifically dub strategies), “repeating is evidence of [...] distinct and different intensifying value [and] is attractive for several reasons” (Henriques 2011.139).

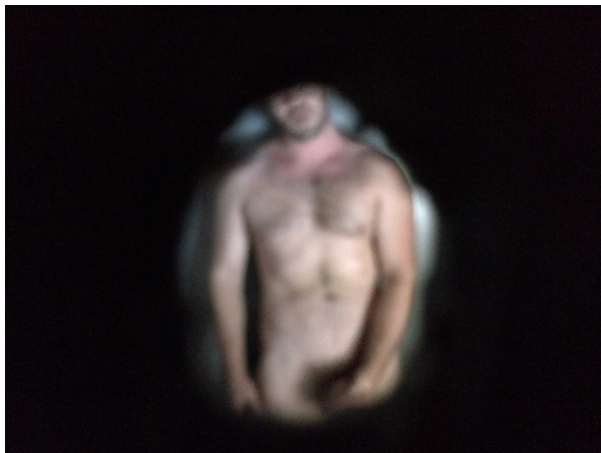
One is that it offers an analysis based on movement and process, that is, the intensities, energies and dynamics, as well as the static structures. Another is that it allows an emphasis on auditory phenomena, characterized by their particularities and relationships, as well as on visual phenomena. Furthermore, it allows for an understanding of identity, continuity and the constitution of phenomena in terms of difference, variation and propagation, as well as similitude, consistency and being. Finally, repeating is what the body does in all its rhythms, cycles and pulses. (Henriques 2011.139-140)

As we understand from Fink, repetition is a form, or method, of desire creation. In this way, Karuhanga’s creative process aligns in familiar and intimate ways with my own studio practice and sonic (and compositional) methods.

Karuhanga’s relationship with HIV/AIDS emerges through her roots in Uganda and the deaths of her aunt, her aunt’s infant, and a wide circle of her father’s friends — all from AIDS-

related causes. Her 2016 contribution to AAN’s poster virus series/campaign mixes colour and form with a text-based passage drawn from personal emails about her late aunt to create what appears—and feels—like a misty landscape, turned on its end. Karuhanga’s recitation of this text is recontextualized in my audio work “Harm (Reduction Mix).”

Shan Kelley



Shan Kelly: details from *The Less You Know About Me, the Safer I Feel* (2014)

Born in 1977, Shan Kelley is a gay-identified artist and father living with HIV. He was raised, “in the prairie backdrop of Alberta, Canada’s beef and petroleum heartland. His work sits amidst a slippage of intersection between art and activism. In his fascination with language, Kelley uses text as material, to scrutinize the manner in which relationships to self, identity, body, and power, are deconstructed, created, and curated” (artist website). Following his seroconversion to HIV-positive, in 2009, Kelley was inspired to discover a personal, artistic, and politicized voice within the context of disease and adversity. Kelley puts his artistic practice to work as action against apathy and surrender.

Kelley’s expansive studio output interrogates the multiple layers of experiential knowledge that comes to light as a person living with HIV: desiring and sexual, stigmatization,

nationalization, aging, domestication, commodification (in terms of curatorial practice and the broader contemporary art world and its institutions), intimate, vulnerable, and vibrant. Using objects, activities, and behaviours that speak to the everyday, Kelley's work combines humour, design, intellect, and risk-taking. In his photographic series, *The Less You Know About Me, the Safer I Feel* (detailed below), anonymous participants are invited to use the artist's personal digital device to capture the artist's image through found peepholes in adult xxx cinema locations. In a number of images that crossover with idioms of porn (voyeurism, exhibitionism, buddy-booth culture), Kelley is depicted holding a Canadian flag over parts of his otherwise naked body, offering a commentary on nationalism (Canada is a leader in vexed practices of HIV criminalization).²⁷

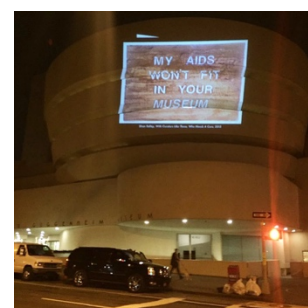
Kelley's 2015 contribution to AAN's Poster Virus series/campaign is "Bloody Positive." In an artist statement on the poster, Kelley writes,

I'm dead tired how an entire pandemic can be reduced to a public health slogan. I'm dead tired of being overmedicated and under-treated. I'm dead tired of the expansiveness of the carceral state. I'm dead from the ongoing tears of our indigenous sisters, our first peoples, and the genocide of their communities. I'm dead from the villainization of people of colour, and I'm gutted by their systemic brutalization. I'm dead that trans and non-binary still can't so much as use a restroom without a court injunction, much less live in peace. I'm dead tired of dumbing down. I'm dead tired of "stakeholders", elected officials, poli-tricks, and being served platitudes that drive only apathy, instead of action. HIV can never exist in isolation, and I'm dead tired of feeling powerless against its entanglement in the fabric of our world. (artist website)

²⁷ Idioms of porn and sexual explicitness are inserted into my dissertation in select ways: through the work and ideas of documentary pornographer Paul Morris and his collaborative writing with Susanna Paasonen, and the writings of Delany (though I do not explore his more explicit and violent sexual narratives such as those in *Hogg*), select Kelley artworks and those of other participants like Belcher (who poses provocatively in his *Kill Me* transit posters and billboard), and Muscat's sculptural works that make explicit such ideas as male genitalia as a site of youthful conjunction (in *Return to Innocence* [below] and the issues of intergenerational sex represented in *A Return to Eden* [illustrated in Chapter Four] that are commonly interpreted as or confused with pornography).

In the second line of this statement, Kelley directly acknowledges (intentionally or not) the notion of iatrogenesis, or “sickness produced by medical activity” (Ibàñez-Carrasco 2018.104). Throughout, the artist conveys the underlying exhaustion, uncertainly, mournful attachments to death (illuminated by the curved crescent of candle flames), and over-exposedness that pervades the daily experiences of people living with HIV. Moreover, he puts risk to work through language and ideas that push back against the preinvented world.

Kelley’s creative output forms a direct line to my dissertation’s four themes through his deployment of explicit sex and sexuality (versus queer theory’s tendency to move toward but ultimately circumvent serious, honest discussion about gay sex and gay subjectivity); his challenge to pre-existing conditions, frameworks, and vexed practices in the contemporary art world and its commodified memory of HIV/AIDS; art as representation, not reproduction; biopolitical and neoliberal managements and investments of HIV/AIDS; the potency inherent in risking the personal through narrative styles that are vulnerable, intimate, and exposing; and the above-mentioned nod to iatrogenesis.



Shan Kelly: *Bloody Positive* (2016); *With Curators Like These, Who Needs a Cure* (2015); in situ projection on the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City (2015)

The tension created by Kelley’s willing participation in heteronormative futurities through the birth of his daughter is important. In *Of Hope and Sickness* (2013), the artist contrasts two photographs taken four years apart. The first shows his on body, swaddled in a comforter

and lying asleep on a sofa in his parent's home, exhausted by, "the difficult and mysterious illness, which plagued me" (artist website). Kelley's HIV-positive diagnosis came four days later. The second image captures his newborn daughter in afternoon nap mode on the very same sofa, creating a "redemptive circle of events which had all but erased the memory of that time of sickness and despair" (artist website). "Watching my daughter sleep triggered contemplation of the innocence of the present moment," writes Kelley, "and a moment I imagined would never be possible given the circumstance of my HIV diagnosis. Reflection now on this dichotomy is the preservation of a moment which serves to frame my entire relationship with my own mortality, perseverance and hope" (artist website).

Tim McCaskell

Tim McCaskell is one of Canada's leading LGBTQI and HIV/AIDS activists. He was member of the collective that ran *The Body Politic*, Canada's iconic gay liberation journal; a founding member of AAN; and a spokesperson for Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QAIA), the grassroots LGBTQI group that sparked controversy through their risky activist tactics in Toronto's Pride celebrations, forums, panel discussions, and cultural events from 2008 through 2012. QAIA disbanded in 2015.

McCaskell's voice is important to my research in layered ways. For example, he is in my generation and, in that way, he and I can talk about issues from relatively similar perspectives. This, however, does not imply we agree on everything, it means that we come from a shared temporal moment with shared losses and experiences. I dated a gay man who lived among the Seaton Street community in the late 1970s and Tim (and his longtime partner, Richard Fung)

lived in the same house. I was in awe of the activist spirit that fuelled this community but I was from a different vector of queerness: the art and music scene of the era. And I did not dress like a clone (mustache, plaid shirt, 501 button-fly jeans) and my propensity for outlandish, new wave attire notably banished me to the margins of what was then mainstream gay Toronto. McCaskell is HIV-positive and, thus, speaks about the crisis from a position of experiential knowledge, not professionalism (which is among the critiques of many individuals who populate the HIV/AIDS research sector and are HIV-negative, a perspective that remains limiting no matter how many ways you slice it). He is sexual and we find common ground in conversations about sexual community, bathhouses, and—as a result of our ages—the Daddy phenomena. Importantly, he understands sex as a site of agency as well as pleasure (McCaskell 2016.175). Finally, McCaskell is vocal, articulate, ambitious, active, and passionate about changing the lived experiences of people living with HIV/AIDS as part of his broader, substantial push for human rights.

Simon Muscat

Dare I look upon this garden that I once knew where no shame, guilt or fear grew
—Simon Muscat (artist website).

Gay-identified artist, Simon Muscat (pictured above), was born on the island of Malta in 1955. His identification as gay, versus queer, is intentional. Muscat finds the pejorative origins of “queer” impossible to negotiate in productive ways. The historical narrative of his studio practice starts with sculpture then transitions to jewelry, goldsmithing, and gem cutting. For several years he produced prodigious works in hollow cast silver, catching the attention and, to some extent, patronage of international affluent collectors. His provocative silver creations convey a deep awareness and respect for organic form(s) and affectivity. Around 2005, while visiting

friends in Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, Muscat took hammer and chisel to stone and, “felt a surge of life through his body, where change was investable. Today, carving stone is his source of passion, inspiration, and learning. How to allow the universe to partake of one’s creation” (artist website).



Simon Muscat, *Return to Innocence*, sculpture (2012): instagram post (simonmuscat5, 25 June 2018); instagram post (audiosmut, 6 February 2019); instagram post (audiosmut, 17 January 2019)

Muscat is extremely transparent about his sexuality, sexual tastes (and appetite), his love for psychic awareness, channeling (and channelers), his fetishes, fears, and desires. Importantly, Muscat lives a predominantly nomadic life, one that puts risk to work in obvious ways (in relationship to money, aging, and security) and subtle ways (that affect and drive his senses of sociality, friendship, and home).

I first met Simon in the fall of 1978, when I returned to Toronto (from my two-year stint in Kingston and a failed first attempt at undergraduate studies, in music) to take up art at the Ontario College of Art (OCA, before D). My circle of friends included musicians in bands that were enlivening the Queen Street West scene, a scene that I was about to enter and thrive in. During a dinner at one associate’s, I encountered Simon in the yard outside. It was impossible to resist his physical charms, his head of tousled black curls, and his accent, which revealed Malta’s colonial roots. Over many years, we would cross paths in diverse spaces and events and, in 1991,

developed a close friendship. On 4 June 1994, I invited Simon to accompany me to a rave (late night electronic music event) where UK drum n bass progenitor, Goldie, was making his Toronto debut.²⁸ I remember the experience in vivid detail: we dropped lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD); danced like there was no tomorrow, so to speak; bought an abundance of fruit-flavoured “freezie sticks” from a club vendor to distribute to the younger attendees (in a gesture we considered *tribal-elder-ness*); and welcomed the dawn’s earliest light in a small side chamber that was vibrating soulfully with house music. Early nineties house music productions are among my favourites. My memory serves me well for two reasons that date-stamp the moment: a vision that I experienced of artist, Felix Partz, in that magically lit room; and a telephone message that was waiting for me at home after Simon and I made the trek on foot, from Broadview and Queen Street East to Parkdale, where we both lived at the time. All the while, the hallucinogens in our bodies were bursting like visual, aural, sentient record-keeping devices. Pleasure in each step, taking delight in childlike likenesses, wishing for ever, time travelling our lives to one another as we pass through neighbourhoods of the city that are already well into the next day’s activities.

Dancing (the night away) with Simon signifies a transitional moment in our friendship, a risking the personal through shared ludic time, and in doing so, becoming ephemeral evidence of risk as it is positioned in this research. The slow unfolding of our way of being together—as homo/sexual artist friends—is guided by, what I understand to be, an intuitive attraction to each

²⁸ Confidence in my memory is distinctly entangled through one of artist AA Bronson’s better known works, *Felix: June 5 1994*, a large-format “billboard” depicting the artist’s partner (in the Canadian artist group, General Idea) four hours after his death. Like many other MSM artists in Toronto, General Idea’s creative practice transformed through AIDS, two of the three members died in 1994 of AIDS-related causes — Jorge Zontal died on 3 February of that year). In *Felix: June 5 1994*, Partz’s (nee Ron Gabe) corpse is attentively laid-out on his bed which is made up with his most colourful linens, an assortment of favourite gadgets (such as a portable audio recorder) and a package of cigarettes at his side, his skeletal frame dressed, in a word, to the nines. Partz was, in fact, a ten; a sly social figure, a very fine artist (to his very last day), a gentleman in most senses of the term, and generous in every way. This title locates the temporal moment with the rave, dancing with Simon, my vision, and the waiting telephone message.

other and our mutual interests in magic and spirit. I name it queer magic and spirit. And Simon, for the reasons stated above, might prefer naming it gay magic and spirit. I historically and currently encounter Simon primarily in one of three spaces: sexual (bathhouse), socio-sonic (disco), or gay arts-oriented (gallery, studio, street). In this way, we generate a friendship that, as homosexuals, is best encapsulated (and interrogated) by Foucault:

What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied and modulated?" The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of sex but rather to use sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. And no doubt that's the real reason why homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable. Therefore, we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are. The development towards which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship. (Foucault 1996.308)

Once—perhaps fifteen years ago—I bumped into Simon in a back hallway of a gay bathhouse in Toronto and in that moment, he reminded me the June 1994 rave experience was, for him, life-changing: the music, the drugs, the rave energies and sensibilities — productive, positive sociality. He also expressed genuine shock when I introduced him to my (then, legal) husband who brushed passed us in the hallway, mid-conversation. His shock was equal parts surprise that I would participate in such assimilationist behaviour and amazement over the erotic and delightfully licentious surroundings paired with the nonchalance of my frank introduction. I admit my own shock, in retrospect, at having subscribed (better yet, indulged) in the homonormative trappings of same sex marriage. *Mea culpa*. I took a less-than-productive risk with that indulgence.

Muscat's integrity—as a man, as an artist, as a sexual being with few boundaries, as a person who is able to speak openly, honestly, and explicitly about his experience as a gay man who knows magic when he sees (hears, feels) it—speaks for itself. I read Simon's artistic practice,

sexuality, and lifestyle as productively risky. I talked at length with Simon about *A Return to Eden*, the work's layered implications of risk, and the themes of intergenerational desire and intimacy that weave through his recent art works.

Conclusion

Through these interviews, I developed the four themes that organize my dissertation: 1) Risking the Personal emerged through most of the interviews as participants discussed issues like living with HIV and HIV-status disclosure (where applicable); 2) the role of sex and Sexual Ecologies in their lives and creative and activist practices; 3) HIV/AIDS and its intersectionalities and risky representations was a recurring theme to emerge in interviews, whether the artist/participant is HIV-positive or not; and 4) art and artistic practice and risk — a theme that is consistent with most of the interviewees either through their artistic responses to AIDS and sex, or as an ongoing motif in artistic practice in general. Through repetition that emerged in the interviews, these themes stood out as sites for development. I began to think about risk as a constellation of multiple kinds of practice—artistic, sexual, safety and so-called safe space, trigger warnings in pedagogy, HIV-positive parenting, and representations of HIV/AIDS. This constellation of thinking runs against the version of risk (and its reduction to a single dimension) that I identify and critique in Gilead's ad for Truvada. Importantly, these themes stress the significance of art and artistic practice as a way to fight AIDS and the industrialization and gentrification of MSM sex and desire. These themes and the artistic commentary generated through interviews are examined in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four: Variations on Themes of Risk

In this chapter, I explore results from the artist, activist, and curator interviews and conversations. In this way, the chapter creates some analysis by way of the valuable collaborative process that conversations between creative minds can yield. This analysis extends into in my dissertation's audio intervention which reflects on (and engages with) conversations about historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and art, the PrEP/U=U landscape, some possible ideas why AIDS is (still) not over, and creative voluntary risk-taking in practices of art and sex, and ludic play/work.

I encourage and reveal HIV-negative perspectives in response to the ongoing responsibility placed on people living with HIV to do most of the heavy lifting. For example, Whitbread discusses (below) her desire for robust sexual health as part of what it means to be in intimate, sexual moments. "Risk," she says, "is different to different people" (interview). Black, Whitbread's creative partner in *The HIV Howler*, reveals that they have had lots of conversations about going to public sex parties together. "What that looks like as a pair," says Black, "what it looks like for me as an HIV-negative person and what it looks like for Jessica as a poz person" (interview).

The idea of risk in those spaces around disclosure, around public sex, around our public participation in other forms of dialogue like teaching, like publically being a [poz] mother. There are so many perceptions that stop people from accessing the sex they want, what should be disclosed in sexual spaces and what should not be, or who should be allowed to be in sexual spaces. (Black, interview)

"I think that risk is not just about physical risk but also the emotional risk," Whitbread chimes in, "which is so much work, to access the kind of sex you want" (interview).

Interviews engaged with personal, experiential, and creative knowledge and opinion, and often focused on particular art works where sex, orientation, risk, safety, and HIV are addressed. In addition to discussions about both the creative possibilities and the self-traumatizing impacts of risking the personal (such as disclosure of HIV status) and acts of voluntary self-risk taking (in art, sex, and life), interview responses illustrate the limits and harm inherent in the pathologizing tendencies of medicalization, HIV treatment and outreach, social and political framings of AIDS, and ludic experimentation. Threads of safety, pleasure, desire, power, stigma, shame, addiction, and identity politics are woven into a descriptive narrative. Throughout, I discuss historical narratives of gay sex and AIDS, and the evolving, lived realities of gay men who participate in the dynamic *continuum* in the era of AIDS industry, homonormativity (and other assimilationist practices and processes that closely resemble gentrification), and the PrEP/U=U landscape.

Map

This chapter documents a crucial part of my research: the conversations yielded important ideas, processes, and experiential knowledge. This chapter is an important presentation of these ideas, processes, and knowledge in one form, which I then take to another form in my audio and video interventions. In these ways, I create a bridge between the interviews and the debates and key points outlined in Chapter One. This bridge works as a threshold to other realities and consciousness, and loosens “our borders, not closing off to others [...] to attempt community” (Anzaldúa 2007.246). The questions were instituted with two goals in mind: 1) simplicity (as a clear opening and passage to deeper discussion), and 2) a means to identify specific art works

for discussion when applicable. Questions were also developed with specific issues in mind: the participant's positionality in relationship to HIV/AIDS and their creative practice; their awareness about historical AIDS narratives and the evolution of these narratives through the dynamic *continuum*, the PrEP/U=U landscape, and AIDS industry; their creative goals in relationship to the crisis; the potential to open dialogue about the vexed subject of HIV/AIDS disability; understandings or misinformations about safer sex practices; and a distinctly artist-driven question (What does risk look and/or sound like?).

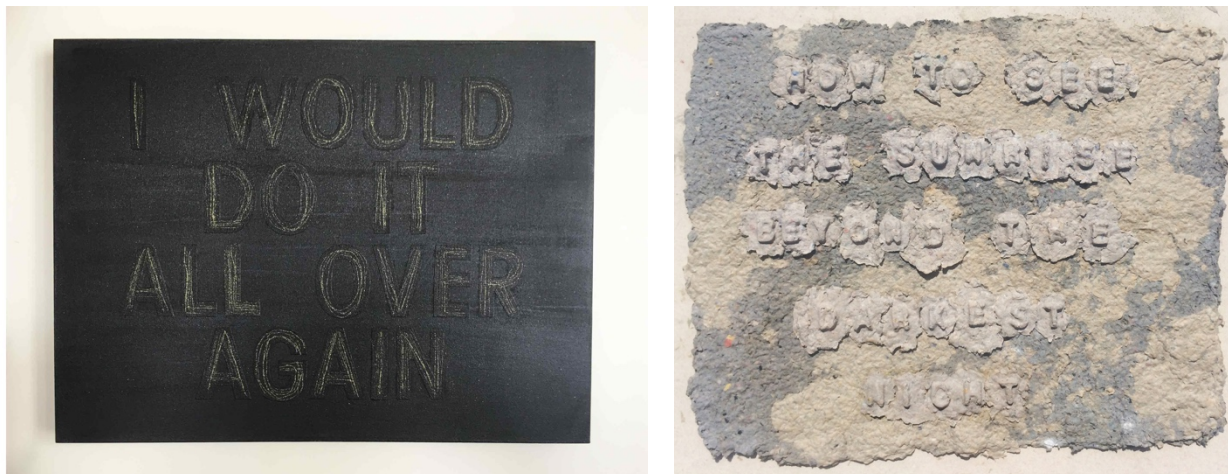
The chapter unfolds through the four themes. In this way, I organize and develop each theme through different combinations of participant voices. The focus is on the participants. My role was creative: I collated and interpreted my participant's views, a role that I developed through my conversations with them, and through identifying and putting the four themes to work. In short, the descriptive narrative that unfolds in this chapter is the work I have undertaken.

Themes

Theme I: Risking the Personal

In this subsection, I narrate concepts of risking the personal through the different participant voices and perspectives, including the benefits of sharing personal narratives as activist, creative, and scholarly methods, as well as ideas of harm that can emerge through these very same methods. In discussing practices of risking the personal, I use the question, what is the current status of safe, to draw out personal and experiential perspectives and opinions. While PrEP and U=U are specifically absent in the questions (to keep the focus on the dynamic

continuum), they are very much present in the key points and the ensuing discussions, with the participants living with HIV in particular.



Shan Kelley: *Old Beginnings* (2017), *How to See the Sunrise Beyond the Darkest Night* (2015)

Kelley describes his aphoristic text painting *Old Beginnings*, which contains the statement “I Would Do It All Over Again,” as an “aloof and opaque reference to the idea of looking back, but looking back as what I’ve heard commonly in testimonials that I have given.”

I used to involve myself with an ASO that was very happy to have me speak and self-traumatize over and over again with these testimonials about diagnosis and how my experience has affected me. I hadn’t realized the weight of what that would be like: to invoke self-trauma so often, and often again. In doing lots of that, it was interesting that after telling my story or opening a conference or a speech to questions or comments — a number of those public speaking engagements involved curious questions about [like] “can you talk about how you were diagnosed, how did this happen, how do you think you become positive, how did you contract HIV?” (Kelley, interview)

Kelley found himself interested in the discomfort that an audience would have with an answer that he would provide. “I was someone who had used condoms for all my sexual interactions that were penetrative, and it kind of relied on that false security [of the condom codex]. I don’t

have one person that I have to identify with and it's left me in a very peaceful place, one that is not attached to one space and place and person."

Kelley likes the idea of moving forward. "If I did know the name and address and email of the person, and we were still in contact, it wouldn't change anything," he claims. "I would have moved forward regardless." For Kelley, *Old Beginnings* speaks to the "unimportance of being stuck in my own past but also makes the double-entendre that 'I would do it all over again,' of course, maybe, in other words, 'differently': 'I would do it all differently.' I don't believe that I would, personally, do anything differently."

Karuhanga thinks a lot about quietness and silence. "The silence around," she begins then pauses. "For a long time, my family used obfuscating language [regarding my aunt] to avoid naming the thing: AIDS. It had everything to do with stigma."

"Talking about risk and taking risks starts conversations," Whitbread declares. "It's like throwing something out there, throwing something into the pot."

People don't necessarily want to talk about risk but putting it out there holds possibility for starting conversations. In relation to HIV, there is a sexiness to risk. If we don't talk about it, we are denying the realities of the situation. For the most part, even people who deny that they take risks: the lessons learned are more conservative. I remember during *Tea Time* [Whitbread's performative AIDS installation series], one woman said "I don't know how this happened [how I tested HIV-positive]. I was just a good church girl." Another woman immediately responded, saying "oh come on — you were not churchin' when you got HIV!" It was so amazing. "You weren't churchin', you had sex with someone." (Whitbread, interview)

Risking the personal can be risky, even when someone else risks telling your personal story.

Deen wants to figure out a way to write about his HIV identity, what he calls "my HIV monster or my HIV prayer." His aim is to find a space of poetry that makes it very clear that it is

not linked to the brand supported by the state or Public Health Canada, spaces that “identify groups of homosexuals, groups of queers, groups that have become branded in new ways and manifestations as a result of HIV.

This is terrifying, this new period of using the gains and progress around treating the virus has allowed the State to identify people. Along with the information that you are HIV-positive, is a lot of paper evidence of your sexual preferences and orientation. All the things you filled out, with your family doctor, even before seroconverting, while all those things are protected by confidentiality laws, the fact is that once you sign-off on that Public Health Canada document, you are out there. (Deen, interview)

Deen remembers the first thing he had to do after he was told that he was HIV-positive was “sign these documents.” “I had to register myself not just within discursive power but also legislative power. That process fucked me up for years after,” he recalls.

I took me years to figure out where HIV stacked up in terms of inheritances. Living diasporically, as a Guyanese-South Asian, means, for many of us, living with our inherited diseases. For most of us this includes diabetes and heart disease. My HIV seroconversion taught me to begin the process of reading disease not through the biology of inheritance, or genetic lines of inheritance, but through an inheritance of queerness: another genealogy. Whether or not people like Audre Lorde, and so many others, had to fight for inclusion into those genealogies of queerness, because that’s where they knew they belong. They knew that they had to do the work to make the space within those genealogies. (Deen, interview)

Deen finds the same thing with disability, “and being able to detect disability in the fetus because the state legitimizes certain a kind of destruction of what might be or could be an othered body — or a body that doesn’t fit into those boundaries that queerness is actually exceeding,” he says. “My poetry practice reminds me of that.”

A big part of disability politics around the HIV-positive body has to do, for Deen, with the ways that body is politically and socially marked. From Deen’s point of view, the HIV-positive

body is marked as “not being capable of ‘x,’ as not being desirable to ‘x.’ There’s the imposition of what is and is not possible around HIV-positive bodies.”

One of those things would be the criminalization of HIV in terms of non-disclosure or disclosure. This tells you right away that legally your body is “other.” What that creates is a psychic disability. So, carrying that around within your body you immediately realize that you’re being contained by the state. (Deen, interview)

Deen knows this is not a traditional approach to how we should talk when we talk about disability. “We need to be aware of the fact that there is no singular meaning to HIV and disability,” he says, adding “there’s no way to answer that question but to consider the ways to open it up.”

To talk about the kinds of struggles in the body that HIV is the conduit for: different kinds of organ failure, different kinds of combination therapy regimes, different kinds of diet depending on your genetic background, struggles with heart disease and diabetes which are all exacerbated with HIV. All of the medical struggles of HIV that are read as disability, as they rightfully should because some of those medical challenges, while being medically treated, still prevent people from having full access to socio-economic and socio-cultural advantages. (Deen, interview)

Deen talks about disability, in relation to HIV, as an additional layer of political othering around bodies that are marked, in another sense, as being “outside” of Wynter’s model of “Man,” the ecological model of sameness, of normalness — the body that is presented as desirable through different media sources.

I come back to the idea that I wouldn’t really know what HIV and disability would look like, because that, in and of itself, is a proliferation of conditions. There’s no way to manage or define that unless you’re thinking of certain theoretical parameters around figuring that out. Maybe this is a moment that I could understand better why it is—because I have HIV—that I am considered in a political sense, in a legislative sense, someone who can claim disability status, then. I always see HIV listed, along with heart disease and diabetes as disabilities, in different

questionnaires and forms. So, I think about disability as discursively living in that context. (Deen, interview)

One of the things Deen wants to figure out is a way to write about his HIV identity, “to find a space of poetry that makes it very clear that it is not *their* triangle, *their* brand, it’s not something that they can slap on my body for the purposes of those containments, to keep me on that side of the morality-marcation.”

All of this is disability; all of this curtails and presents new challenges to our continuing struggle for full citizenship. People think that because there is a sexual inclination in *Queer Eye*, on Netflix, because we had Will & Grace, Ellen, and Neil Patrick Harris, and Rosie O’Donnell — all very assimilationist. We’re in the age of pride and driving homonationalism, and this homo thing that started in fabulous interrogative ways that was also about sweetness and tenderness and campiness — now there is the presence of drag queens in libraries reading storybooks to children. (Deen, interview)

Belcher’s practice is, in many ways, a layered exercise in risking the personal. Moreover, his HIV-negative status and perspective is crucial to the larger discussion that takes place in this chapter as an expression of risk in artistic practice, pure and simple. I ask Belcher if it’s safe to suggest that his experience and practice are about accepting certain kinds and amounts of risk in his life. “Absolutely,” he replies without hesitation.

I believe what I do is what I’m supposed to do. But within the mechanism of the type of world that we live in, that’s just not an avenue that there ever used to be before. Also because I live in a country that’s basically, when it comes to the art system, it’s a socialist system — and that’s not the way I work. So I don’t fit into my own country’s system. So I have even more risk, going out on my own, in a country that’s based on committee. (Belcher, interview)

I am particularly interested in, and drawn to, Belcher’s series *Kill Me* (1992-1997) as a key example of risking the personal in—and out of—artistic practice. According to the artist’s

website, the *Kill Me* series began with the Paradise Europe billboard project in Copenhagen (1992).

The artist's personal home telephone number (in Köln, Germany) was printed across confrontational and oversexed images of the artist, exploring issues as varied as depression, sex chat lines, reality culture, and self-promotion. A sequel version was produced in 1997 featured the artist's new telephone number in Toronto. The most controversial of the Art Metropole "Billboards by Artists" series, this work was not exhibited in downtown Toronto as intended due to a decision by Advertising Standards Canada. A series of collages using Stern magazines was produced in the early '90s. These works featured a ransom note approach and were signed with the artist's name and phone number. (artist website)

Belcher was invited by a group in Copenhagen called BizArt to design a billboard that would be installed in various locations around Copenhagen. "It was a really good group show," says Belcher, adding, "there was also a museum exhibition around it as well."

There were probably a dozen artists that made billboards. This was a time when I was very depressed and, frankly, suicidal. I couldn't walk over a bridge without thinking about jumping over. I thought, instead of posturing to, you know, make art that was about anything but — to take it to the polar opposite, to make art about my depression and about being a victim. It was styled in a very sexual, plain, naked type of way with a little bit of commentary on, at that point, about the sex phone lines and cruising in general. It had me with a sort of badge saying, "Kill Me" and it had my home telephone number on it. These billboards were erected all over Copenhagen, especially around the metro system. (Belcher, interview)

Afterwards, Belcher exhibited a series of voodoo dolls with the "Kill Me" special edition print which the BizArt team had produced for all the artists at Daniel Bucholtz. The voodoo doll project can also be understood in relation to risking the personal — and risk-taking in artistic practice.

When Belcher returned to Germany, which is where he was living at the time, in Cologne, he began work on voodoo dolls made in his own image, a risky proposition. The term voodoo

doll is commonly used to describe an effigy, or small handcrafted figurine, typically created in the image of a specific individual. The effigy is subjected to an assortment of harmful gestures—poked with pins, set on fire, handled violently—to affect pain, disfigurement, and/or death in the individual who is represented. For Belcher to create voodoo dolls in his own image and, importantly, to release them into the universe through exhibition and sales is to leave his fate to an anonymous gallery viewer or art collector. Regardless of spiritual and ritual ambivalences about voodoo dolls, Belcher invites hostility without control or intervention.



Alan Belcher, 1993: *Kill Me* (flyer), select voodoo dolls

“At that time, I was going through a bit of a depression,” Belcher reveals, “because the nineties is when the art world went for a complete dive after the feast of the eighties.” Living in Germany, he didn’t have money and was trying to still function.

The voodoo dolls were made with my materials at hand: my used bed sheet, my socks, my hair, my nails, my blood. I’ve always strived to try to make work that I believe hasn’t existed before and I thought, “no one has made voodoo dolls of themselves before.” For me, it was—like lots of my work—functioning as a surrogate of the artist. As an artist you do understand that once you release it into the world you have no control over it. It basically functioned as self-portraits but with an extreme amount of trust involved. (Belcher, interview)

In the most basic sense, as an artist, Belcher makes these objects to leave behind when he is gone. “With the voodoo dolls especially,” he says, “there is this element that I am sticking around.”

So it does incorporate a spiritual aspect even a little bit of superstition within the occult, that sort of thing. I mean, myself, I don't believe in God, I don't believe in heaven, I don't believe I have a spirit. *But* I do believe that leaving works of art behind will resonate my life force. (Belcher, interview)

“I have one voodoo doll but I made around sixty,” says Belcher. “I know where ten are. Three of them were stolen from the show at Jack Shainman ... if that's not creepy.”

I do believe the voodoo dolls possess a certain amount of my spirit within them. And you only want positivity out there. So, as much as I don't believe in a human spirit, I do believe in a positive spirit. You want to believe the stolen [voodoo dolls] especially, that people took them in a positive manner. The show was specifically set-up where many of [the dolls] were lying around on tables, in a shoebox, on a shelf ... so they were very accessible ... which was a risk. (Belcher, interview)

Risking the personal can be understood, more generally, in current popular cultures of individualism where, specifically, the habitual uses of social networking. Here, people often share intimate details of their personal lives and risking the personal becomes pervasive and prevalent — but in curiously curated ways. Belcher agrees, adding, “yes, very edited. Food and vacation, and receptions, and hanging out with friends, clothes purchases, and things like this. But never really sharing break-ups and depression.”

I asked Belcher how he determines the difference between kinds of sharing of the personal compared to riskier revealing of interiors. “Especially with the [Kill Me] billboards, it's much more of a surprise or shock for someone to be walking down the street and encounter this kind of graphic and questioning and sentiment,” he suggests. “These days when you're going to Instagram you are sort of prepared to see things. But when it's a billboard on a subway platform,

you definitely are putting it into someone's consideration — because they are used to certain types of advertising, certain concepts, usually selling mechanisms.”

I did purposely use photos, in basically a collage manner, but I did use photos that were immediately if not attractive or seductive at least not the type of imagery that you would encounter in a day outside. (Belcher, interview)

Belcher may be putting his health (and life) at risk in these kinds of creative interventions, but he controls the representation of his body and, to certain degrees, his story.

Like Belcher, it's important for Shan Kelley to own his personal story. But Kelley tries to feel like he has more agency, that there's a means to mitigate safety and risk through the telling of his own story. Moreover, he sometimes aims for radical overexposure radical overexposure through photography and text pieces that reveal his behaviours, identities, and curiosities. “I think that safety is attached to exposure in that I feel shameless when I try to express what brings me pleasure, or what behaviours should not be attached to shame,” Kelley claims.

In his series of photographs *The Less You Know About Me, The Safer I Feel* (below), the artist is depicted in images captured with his own camera phone through peepholes in walls by strangers who were approached in adult XXX cinema locations. Kelley's outline of the project states:

From the insides of a locked cinema viewing booth, the flicker of coin operated screens serve as the only lighting source while strangers, who have been handed a camera phone, proceed to take photos through tiny peepholes carved through the wooden walls. The small lens of the camera phone captures what a lens of any other size could not. (<https://shankelley.com/the-less-you-know-about-me-the-safer-i-feel>)

Kelley suggests the series is “more about a celebration of the idea of sexuality and the risk attached to being shamed. I think that the sauna, the bathhouse, the peep show — these spaces

that exist are still very much a grey area and yet part of our cities, though they are slowly fading away and being eroded. But they exist as places of shame, I feel. The kinds of connections that happen in those spaces don't necessarily happen anywhere else." In this way, Kelley aligns with Delany's vision of peep shows, porn theatres, and other sites of anonymous cruising and sex as sites where meaningful social contact can take place versus more common moralizing judgments.



Shan Kelley, details from *The Less You Know About Me, the Safer I Feel* (2014)

In risking the personal in relation to the topic of AIDS cure, Kelley believes that cure, as an object, requires him to activate a certain sense of what AIDS means for him, personally. "It involves tearing down the structures that allowed AIDS to flourish in the first place," he says, adding "I'm no longer convinced that cure is ultimately the most important thing. We have to work towards supporting one another with compassion. Cure will come from those kinds of actions." He thinks that AIDS is currently experiencing a "prolonged moment" and we may very well see cure happen. But, like me, he doesn't know how it will come about but stresses the importance that we—as HIV-positive individuals—continue to pressure the people involved in that process in whatever ways are possible. "As people living with HIV," Kelley states, "we are the ones that should help direct that."

When practices and processes of risking the personal entwine with identity, Kelley shares some intimate details in relation to his HIV status. "I saw myself as someone who was taking

risks in [the process of] outing myself as someone who was comfortable saying 'I'm a poz person,' and then [becoming] empowered by that idea — saying and being a poz person." I understand this particular risk. Similarly, Kelley was empowered through his practice of being vocal about a queer politic and a queer sexuality, and I relate to that as well. Kelley, however, no longer finds attachments to risk in sharing his queer politics and sexuality. "They may [still] be in some spheres and circles," he adds.

And that's where I think maybe choosing to disclose differently, like employment or at the bank—if I have to take out a loan and don't want to get into the details about how viral loads work or how I'm going to live a great life and you can still ensure my moonlight bank loan because I'm not going to die tomorrow. (Kelley, interview)

Critical to risking the personal as it relates to HIV/AIDS is Kelley's to becoming a parent just over two years ago — a life change that impacts on his ideas of risk and disclosure. "I don't attach the same levels of risk to the idea of identity as I previously did," he says, "but there are new identities that I have now—as a father—and I've talked and written about this in some of my work, and because of some of my work.

Being a father now means that I have to be conscious of what risk means, not just to me. I am concerned more about somebody who is in proximity to me might experience, rather than me personally — because the stigmas are very real still, and very strong. (Kelley, interview)

Kelley believes he has a very protective nature and that as a father, he must try to be conscious of what he does, how he acts, and how his words, artistic expressions, and actions might jeopardize the safety of those around him that he loves. "For example," he says, "I am very conscious about the ways I talk about illness or social justice issues, around my daughter."

We're not yet into talking about papa and his HIV, but we will be. I want to give her a sense of fairness and compassion so that she understands the

fundamentals of equality, and what it means to live through ideas of risk and to stand up for things we believe in. (Kelley, interview)

Kelley now understands this relatively new role as a new risk in his life and what he identifies with. “With my own sexual proclivities and my own identity in art, and other sorts of risk-taking, I am less concerned — except the affects that I can pass along to my daughter, and my wife as well.”

Although she is a queer-identified artist, community organizer, activist, and academic, who lives with HIV, Whitbread is also a parent. She contributes important entanglements of risking the personal and parenting. “There is a bunch of stuff that comes up,” Whitbread contends. “There is the risk of breastfeeding and parents’ rights to have access to information to make the best decision that they feel is possible with relation to breast feeding and pregnancy in general.” Whitbread wonders when, exactly, do people, parents, or family get to choose or acknowledge the risks of growing up, that is, when they believe the benefits outweigh the risks? “When does the medical establishment, and society at large, get to impose their ideas around where the line of risk lies,” she asks. “In HIV it’s always the teeniest amount of risk that is too much.”

It is true, when it comes to making another person inside you, and perhaps feeding them, there is always a risk. But beyond that, I believe that risk in parenting includes questions about why you have children, and when and how will you tell your children, risks about—and I think about this often—how the children will know me in a certain context, as their mother and protector and important person, and I’m sure at some time this will change. Will they experience their mom based on my HIV status? The risk of disclosing to them ... it’s fine for me to live gay and out and do all this stuff. Then I get pregnant, they come into this world and as a child it’s not their choice. They don’t make a choice to publically disclose or, like me, prance around in their underwear and talk about fucking. They are a case study in a Canadian study about breastfeeding. They didn’t choose that but they are a part of all that. (Whitbread, interview)

Whitbread has also heard stories from activist colleagues who are living with HIV and are also parents. She shares a story of one activist whose 16 year-old pleads for them to stop producing AIDS-related artwork, stop talking on the television, stop talking about HIV, “be normal.”

Whitbread wants to create a children’s book, in collaboration with Kelley, but is considering both the beneficial and harmful aspects of such a project. AIDS activist, writer, and curator Darien Taylor works closely with Whitbread as a fellow poz woman, friend, and mentor in the Positive Women movement. “Darien said, ‘I don’t know if you should do that. Do you really want to do that? Do you want to put that information out there? The community is so awful and brutal and not forgiving.’” Taylor is afraid that Whitbread will be hurt in the process, especially as it relates to children in general, and her children in particular, “because it’s too close.”

Whitbread’s curatorial partner in *The HIV Howler*, Anthea Black, is an activist and educator. Black is, also (and notably, in context with risking the personal), sexually involved with Whitbread. Black suggests the other piece to risk—in relation to parenting, risking the personal, and the ways we try to nurture and naturalize issues like HIV in family settings—is delivered through educational systems and other forms of normative dialogue that children absorb.

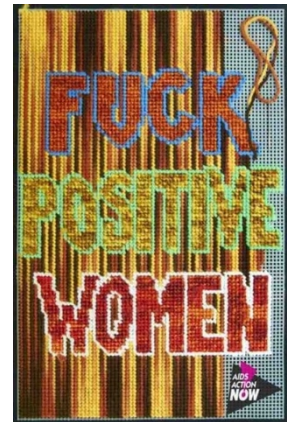
They [children] also don’t necessarily have the choice or the critical agency at certain stages in life to be able to say, “that’s bullshit, our family is totally fine, we’re okay.” They hear a message and then they internalize it in the same way that everybody internalizes stigma: it hurts and it goes to a bad place. Everybody goes to school and everybody’s crap collides. (Black, interview)

From a public/privacy perspective, Black asks, “whose privacy is actually guaranteed?”

“If certain parents might just never have to question that it’s their right to make decisions about the privacy of what they do in their home, how they raise their children, the kinds of conversations they have with them,” Black says.

Then, when the long arm of the state and what people think is appropriate and other political stuff — when that starts to creep into your space, and your home, and other things that people take for granted about private decisions. There are two ladies on the bus who are breastfeeding — why does someone take issue with one and not the other? (Black, interview)

“People have an idea that privacy is in your home, and that’s just not true. The social pressure of parenting is intense,” Black adds, then outlines what she understands as interlocking layers: “the social pressure of parenting, of being in relationships, of being an artist.” Whitbread jumps in, wondering how it will be with her children, “to be socialized and then come back into our home?” Especially when our values are about honesty, trust, and communication,” Black responds.



Jessica Whitbread: *AIDS Famous* (2015), *No Pants No Problem* (2004), *Fuck Positive Women* (2011)

Whitbread’s photographic work, *AIDS Famous*, is perhaps her boldest statement in relation to risking the personal. In context with many of her other projects—like *No Pants No Problem*, and *Fuck Positive Women* (in collaboration with Allyson Mitchell)—Whitbread reveals her creative courage in terms of disclosure and sexual activity. I ask Whitbread about AIDS

Famous: how it came to be and how it is received. "It came about because I really reflected on my being open and the work I produce as being actively positive," she begins.

On a spectrum, there are people who when they become positive they extricate themselves and go into a little cocoon. On the other end of the spectrum, there are people who are, like, "I'm poz, I'm amazing!" And then there are people in the middle who just live their lives. I used to live on the end of the spectrum that's like "I'm me, you can't touch me." After many years of thinking that I am as far away from the person who is cocooning and lives in fear, I'm now actually more like that person than the person who is just living their life.

We all create defense mechanisms in order to exist on opposite ends of the spectrum, but we are more alike than different. So with AIDS Famous, I realized my social capital was in an art and activist community and I gained some recognition as an artist and activist living with HIV, and one of the only open, out, queer women that was producing work and willing to talk about sexual autonomy. For me, I had to do some reflection because there were people who wanted to fuck me, and I felt very tokenized. That body of work, and experience, really is a reflection on what was gained in being open about my HIV status. And if we go back to risk, it's something that occurs when we put everything on the table. I was feeling bad, but it was read as "you are so brave, you are my hero, you're my mentor, it's so powerful." And I was like, I just need a hugger. I just wanted to be a person, but I become the wrong person. (Whitbread, interview)

Black adds her voice to this discussion. "The vulnerability about putting so much on the table," she says, "is that other people have their own perceptions, and they take and distort things in different ways."

The figure who becomes a really strong public figure who is known for specific things ...it's hard to access community support, and it's hard to access people who want genuine connections and want something. When you're a movement leader and things get messy, which is what happens with most social and political movements. When things are high, people really take care of you and want you, and there's a commoditization of you as a figure. And when things get low, it's like, where are all those fucking people? (Black, interview)

Whitbread shares a story about working as co-curator on AAN's poster virus. After three years of experiencing growth in the project and different social scenes in different cities, she had to step back and ask herself if she was working out of necessity or was she doing it to feed her own ego. She—and her curatorial partners—ended up stopping because they could no longer understand why they were continuing in the face of so much controversy and blowback.

"It's interesting too when you're producing something—whether that thing is talks, lectures and workshops, community briefs, or posters or the newspaper—when you produce a thing, people want more of the thing," says Black.

One of the things I admire about you, Jessica, you really are a relationship-builder. The relationship has to go through highs and lows, and sticking through something with integrity is more important, to us, than other external market-driven things — produce, produce, produce. I also think another element of risk is that when you risk things like making a big splash and putting yourself out there, one of the risks is that you do all that work and achieve a sense of accomplishment, but you still don't feel good. On the surface is the accomplishment, and below there can be disappointment in being let down by our communities, by institutional cultures that reduce your work to the lowest common denominator or don't pay or don't recognize the value of your labour. Those things can be really harmful and difficult to navigate. (Black, interview)

Deen recalls the day he seroconverted to HIV-positive, and the ways that music and his family history—and critical family events—are tied to his sense of risking the personal. "There was a day when I was cooking for my sister and I was listening to a live Donna Summer record, and I started weeping," says Deen. "I just started bawling my brains out uncontrollably, and I had no idea where that was coming from." Deen then realized the reason.

It was coming from this thought that I had: listening to the cheering and the applause, and the rapport with the audience, [and] that most of those people who were part of that correspondence are dead, they would have died, they would have died within years of that concert. I realized the way that people have historicized the decade, from mourning to activism, that

there is still so much work that still has yet to be done around mourning; the fact that that work might have to happen—or continue happening—with everything that has happened for the better, at least for some of us, it doesn't make that work of mourning regressive. (Deen, interview)

"In that moment, I was able to script my own mourning, the mourning I countered, I suffered, I bore, that lifted me as well as threw me down," he says.

The morning that I seroconverted, when I was first told that I am HIV-positive, I began this work of mourning that was very much connected to the unfinished mourning that I had around my mother's death, in 1996. It was really interesting to me that I thought about my mother. My mother's face was the first face that I saw in my mind when I seroconverted. Testing positive was about all of that — but it was really about what certain cultural products that I remember as a young—10-, 11-, 12-year old queer born in 1968—that music caused another layer because it was somebody's ephemera and it was very much my own. I realized that hearing a song, and then the song ends, and then it's supposed to not be there anymore but it always is. The ephemera aspect remains in your memory — how you feel about that listening. So when I started reading Jose Muñoz's theory around that exact subject—of ephemerality—I had a language to understand those feelings that I was experiencing back in that kitchen, cooking for my sister, inhabiting the role of nurturer which is a role so many gay men play in different contexts in our community. (Deen, interview)

Activist and educator Tim McCaskell risks the personal regularly when he pursues recreational sex at gay bathhouses in Toronto. About a year ago, he met a man at XS. "We were playing around and it transpires that he wants to fuck me," says McCaskell.

I said, sure. Then he says, "I've got to ask you a question first. Are you poz? I replied, "Yes, I am." Often that marks the end of that conversation. He said, "Hmmm — are you undetectable? That was the first time anyone had ever asked me that question. I said, "Yes." He said, "Great, we don't have to use a condom." So, you know, that was progress, right? (McCaskell, interview)

More recently, McCaskell was at Steamworks and encountered another man who wanted to fuck him. "We had been playing around for a while and just said a few words: *I'm neg and on*

PrEP and *I'm poz and undetectable*. That was the conversation and we went right ahead. These are signs of progress."

McCaskell continues to share personal stories of risk in relation to sex and bathhouses. "There was one guy who wanted a daddy," he begins. "He wanted to get fucked so I used a condom. No negotiation so I just put on a condom."

I didn't want to pay the price. We fucked for a while and neither of us came. We stopped and cuddled for a while. Then he wanted me to fuck him again so I put on a condom and fucked him for a while. And then we were cuddling again and I took the condom off. I was still hard. Suddenly, in one fluid movement, he flipped over and sat on my dick and came all over the place. So, I said, "If you're worried about HIV and stuff, that's kind of dangerous." He said, "but you don't have it do you?" I said, "Yeah, I'm positive. We never even talk about it — you noticed that I was wearing a condom, right?"

Then he was freaking out. Then I'm in a counseling session — he doesn't know about undetectable, he doesn't know anything at all. He only knows he did something bad and thinks he's going to die. I met him in the hall an hour later and he was still agitated. I had to sit down again for another counseling session. There are people getting paid to do this work, I'm here to get fucked! (McCaskell, interview)

Theme I Summary

In this section on risking the personal, Belcher, Black, Deen, Karuhanga, Kelley, McCaskell, and Whitbread narratively explored the different ways that they take up risk and the personal in their creative and activist practices and, directly and indirectly, HIV/AIDS.

Belcher reflects on two series of work from the 1990s, *Kill Me* and voodoo dolls made in his own image. In both instances, the artist takes enormous risks by a) providing clear, identifiable images of his face (and, in *Kill Me*, his almost naked and provocatively positioned body: ready for action), and b) access to his personal life and wellbeing: in *Kill Me* by including

his home telephone number, and in the voodoo dolls a means of entry to his psychic life and/or subtle body when a user inflicts harm to a doll. Both series were created during peak AIDS wartime, the years directly before HAART was released and death rates were unimaginable and horrifying. Belcher is HIV-negative but the temporal and political layers in both series are potent reflections on making art in the pre-treatment AIDS era and the affective impacts of living in that time as a sexually active MSM. In similarly personal and risky fashion, Kelley and Whitbread each *expose* themselves physically, psychically, and emotionally. In *The Less You Know About Me, the Safer I Feel*, Kelley risks the personal in two ways: 1) he offers his personal digital device to a stranger who occupies the neighbouring “buddy booth” in a peep show facility so that the person can take “anonymous” of Kelley with his device. In the photographs Kelley is naked, a risk that is further compounded by a stranger who is now in possession of his personal device, its contents and powers. Whitbread also sensually exposes her own body, in lingerie and seductive poses, in *AIDS Famous* she combines her physical beauty and tantalizing pose with direct AIDS messaging that blur the lines between disclosure and notions of celebrity in ways that are pornographically suggestive. Moreover, *AIDS Famous* captures the artist in her own bedroom, on her own bed, with all the textures and trimmings of the personal. This is risky seduction.

Kelley and Whitbread also share risking the personal through the experiential knowledge and identity transforming event of parent. For Kelley, fatherhood is experienced as a life change that impacts his ideas of risk and disclosure. Whitbread’s experience with mothering is multivalent: risk of breastfeeding, parent’s rights to information, the lines imposed by the medical establishment in relation to (perceived) risks, and the frustrations and privacy issues for

the children of HIV-positive parents who are also artists who make AIDS art for public consumption. Black, too, is implicated in these layers as Whitbread's lover and creative collaborator. She understands and experiences many of the vulnerabilities of living with HIV. Though she is, herself, HIV-negative Black's intimate and public connection with Whitbread affords naked exposure to the perceptions, distortions, and stigmatizing impositions of others.

Karuhanga and McCaskell both take personal risks in relation to concepts of silence. For Karuhanga, cultural and family silences avoid "naming the thing: AIDS." McCaskell is disturbed by the silences around meth-use in relation to MSM sex and the absence of public health and activist campaigning, and continuing misinformation or absence of knowledge in sexual MSM communities altogether about HIV transmission. In both cases, stigma is a subtext.

Deen risks the personal through his HIV status disclosure and explicit poems that conjure magical (and risky) discos and constellations of blowjobs that, in turn, reveal his explorative sexuality. Importantly, Deen exposes his ideas about disability at the vexed intersection with HIV, describing HIV disability as psychically and discursively lived in relation to criminalization, and the challenges and impositions to concepts and processes of citizenship. These issues can also be sensed in Whitbread's *No Pants No Problem* and *Fuck Positive Women* where identities and bodies are both celebratory (at the disco) *and* on record.

Theme II: (Ludic or Radical or Risky) Sexual Ecologies

Gay male bathhouse culture as a vector of radical gay sex and the kinds of sexual activity that co-exist with spa spaces are central to my dissertation. In "traditional, straight dominated society," writes McCaskell, "emotional and sexual relations had been entangled in an attempt

to protect women from the abuses of male power, to facilitate stable child rearing, and to consolidate property" (McCaskell 2016.160).

But modern capitalism, with its constant development of human needs, was pulling these two things apart. As society became more equal, recreational sex and emotional attachment were becoming independent, and capital was flowing in to meet and amplify the former. (ibid)

MSM were not divided by gender inequality and male income privilege put MSM at the forefront of this development. "The baths," writes McCaskell, "were the prime example of such a development" (ibid).

There, for a fee that made their organization profitable, gay men could find other men for sexual play, safely and efficiently, and in ways that either didn't disrupt or could be complementary to more long-term relationships located in other sites and institutions. (McCaskell 2016.160)

Dianne Chisholm notes, "the gay bathhouse once choreographed a love of citizen for citizen and citizen for city [and] is not fairy phantasmagoria that progress and enlightenment have made obsolete but a dialectical production whose excavation and remembrance compels us NOW to recognize the unfinished revolution of its historic present" (2005.96-99). These voices and perspectives illustrate the productive character of urban sexual spaces as sites of meaningful, cross-class social contact that address issues of chronic mobility (through local access to pleasure), ecologies of networking, and sexual ecologies.

Toronto's queer history of bathhouse struggle is a complex narrative of oppression, resistance, and unification. In February 1981, Toronto police forces executed a concentrated attack on five gay bathhouses; the attack produced not only damage to property but also a trail of destruction in the personal lives of men arrested during the raids. In 1998, a project of the AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) evolved into the Toronto Women's Bathhouse Committee

(TWBC) and began running bathhouse parties. According to The Archives (Canada's LGBTQ2+ Archives), TWBC nicknamed the project Pussy Palace in their early incarnations, and opened the doors of Club Toronto to both cisgendered and trans women. In September 2000, a Pussy Palace event at Club Toronto—"2000 Pussies"—was raided by Toronto police.

Two undercover female police officers were sent inside first to investigate the event. After midnight, five plainclothes male police officers then searched the club, including private rooms, for an hour and a half, ostensibly checking for liquor license violations. They did not give significant warning to the around 350 attendees, many of whom were nude or semi-clad, and threatened obstruction charges if women warned others in yet-raided parts of the club. The raid was a violation of queer women and trans men's privacy, masquerading as a liquor license check. (Taylor and Powell 2019)



Onya Hogan-Finlay, Kim Kelley, and Tara Jane O'Neill: *A/V Steam* (2012), left: installation detail, right: invitation

Halifax-based interdisciplinary artist and educator, Hogan-Finlay identifies as queer and cisgender female. One of Hogan-Finlay's projects, created in collaboration with Kim Kelly, is called *A/V Steam*. Responding to the vexed history of women's bathhouse space in Canada, *A/V Steam* riffs on "audio/visual" and also "anus/vagina." "It was a steaming sauna experience happening in a U-Haul trailer," explains Hogan-Finlay, "that was also riffing on the joke about

the lesbian U-Haul — how lesbian’s go out on a first date and get a U-Haul to get together” (interview).

We got a U-Haul and we converted it into a sauna for all genders to experience. We had a zigzag bench with openings and we collected mugwort, an herb that is traditionally used in Korean vagina steaming [also known as *yonni steaming*]. We worked with musician Tara Jane O’Neill, who created a soundtrack for this immersive experience, and we culled video footage from the Mazer Lesbian Archives [Los Angeles]. We had audio and video happening, and people could sit there with what we called a modesty-skirt round your waist, sitting with strangers, and steaming your under carriage.

Thinking about risk, in terms of this site, and trust where strangers would come in ... it was part of a queer performance context, an outdoor space, and some people would pop their head in and say, “Can anyone come in?” “Is this just for women?” Anyone could come in and sit down and enjoy this gentle, tease steaming of your genitals — just sit there are relax in this semi-public space, being that it was in a trailers. I wanted to share that with you in context with the bathhouse, and cruising and shared space, and intimacy and risk. (Hogan-Finlay, interview)

I asked Muscat what risk looks like in relation to sex. “Risk, in sex, looks like when you totally allow yourself to interact with a number of people.”

I’ve never practiced safe sex, so then what it comes down to, for me, is my relationship with people. Perhaps I’ve been fortunate. I am selective of people I engage with physically. It does baffle me [though]: people who can get fucked by anybody. (Muscat, interview)

I asked McCaskell the same question, while wondering aloud if risk can be entangled with pleasure. “It can be,” he says.

I’m a bath boy, right? So when I think about risk these days, HIV is probably lower on my list. It’s a chronic, manageable infection. Yes, it’s not something you want to get but, on the other hand, it’s not the end of your life anymore. Far more risky, in terms of bath sex, is people using crystal meth. There, I can see that people are dying from it. There’s no fucking treatment. So there’s real risk ... dying from being addicted. And if [users] don’t die, their whole lives just fucking fall apart. They go from having family and relationships to being homeless. (McCaskell, interview)

McCaskell's "bugabear" with ASOs these days is about meth use in gay bathhouses, and in gay sexual community in general. "If you go into any restaurant, there are signs that read: if you are pregnant, don't drink. If you buy cigarettes, there is a big sign on each package saying THIS IS GOING TO GIVE YOU CANCER."

You can't control people's behaviour, but you can at least warn them. When you go to the bathhouse, there are no signs up saying "Meth is dangerous." Absolutely nothing. When you think about the campaigns when they wanted us to all have safer sex, there were posters up everywhere — education work happening all the time on all levels. Today, [ASOs] seem to be locked into the harm reduction thing. And if people are using, then harm reduction is better than nothing, play with fewer bullets in the chamber — you're less likely to blow your head off. I don't know why the ASOs are so frightened of saying to people: THIS IS BAD SHIT, DON'T TAKE IT. There are all sorts of ways you can do that. (McCaskell, interview)

I asked McCaskell why are ASOs not handling meth issues as they did with HIV and safer sex campaigns? "What they say is, 'we don't want to produce stigma.'"

When [ASOs] demanded that everybody use condoms, then it produced stigma for people who didn't use condoms. And that contributed to people who were positive because, obviously, a rule was broken, right? That's their good reason. A friend who works in ASOs tells me that half of them are using — staff. (McCaskell, interview)

"The only thing you ever saw in the baths [pre-AIDS] was weed," says McCaskell. "But then, when the epidemic hit, coke came on the scene."

Who wants to feel laidback and mellow in the midst of [a] horrible disaster? No, you want to feel powerful and invincible and energetic. So people shifted to coke. As well as the fact that suddenly the price was dropping because the CIA was smuggling it into the US to fund the contras in Nicaragua. In lowering the price, it met another need. Before that time, you would smoke a joint before sex because it made everything so much more sensuous. But this is just like ... (sighs). (McCaskell, interview)

McCaskell tends toward conversation when he engages in recreational sex at gay bathhouses; and he also tends to go with younger guys at the bathhouse. "I'm kind of a daddy figure," he

declares. “Many of [the younger bathhouse clients] do not have a clue. So I try to get into conversations with them — what kind of drugs to you take?” This is where the discussion connects with my theme of ludic time — and the ways that drugs can be used to facilitate achieving ludic states more quickly.

One guy I was talking to, he used meth once or twice and he said, “thank you very much — you’re the only person who has said anything about this.” There was another guy, a Mexican student, he came over and I offered him a joint. He said, “yeah, I’d like to take that — I’ve never tried it before.” If I had offered him crystal, he would have taken that too. He didn’t have a clue about the difference. There are people that are falling into this shit — and they’re all coping until suddenly they’re not coping anymore. (McCaskell, interview)

McCaskell remembers going in to the baths on a Friday night and having sex with this guy who asked if he could smoke up [meth] in McCaskell’s room. “I said, I don’t do it but go ahead,” says McCaskell. “I went back on Sunday—I was being a bit of a whore that weekend—and he was still there. His fantasy was that he was going to get up for work on Monday morning. I was like, no you’re not — you’re fucked.”

Another guy at XS, really lean, not hugely muscled but nice definition. We were playing around and he basically wanted to get fucked. So I’m fucking and fucking and fucking but there’s not much coming back — but it’s all right. So he says, “this is really great but I want to go off for a second and I’ll come back.” Of course, he’s off to get his hit. Later on, he was downstairs and I asked, “You’re using tina, right?” “Yeah, yeah, but I’m stopping. I realize I’ve got a problem with this, I’m all jittery, and I lost my job.” Then he says, “I’m going to go into rehab but now I’m going to go have one last hit.” I thought, “you’re never going to get the fuck out of here, and you’re not going to be in rehab tomorrow.” He was completely caught. (McCaskell, interview)

Another friend of McCaskell’s has managed to stay clean for six months. They were having lunch together to mark the occasion. “He was so happy to celebrate,” McCaskell says. “I asked him, how is your sex life? He said he can’t have sex — it’s intrinsically tied to the drug. As

soon as he gets horny, if there's a possibility — 'suddenly I have to use. So, no more sex for me.' He's thirty-five or forty."

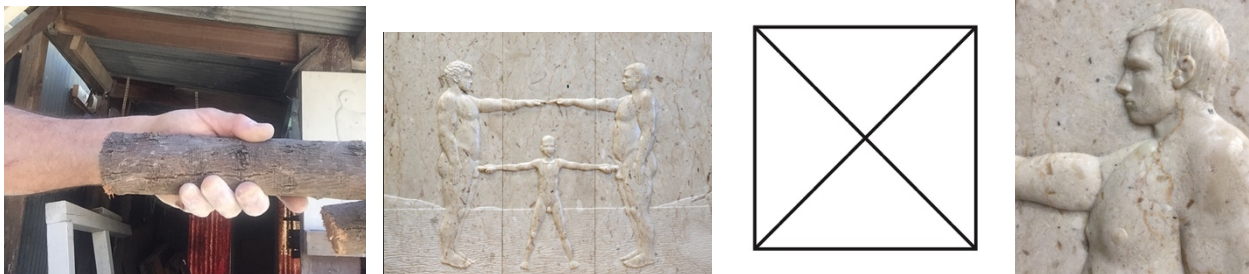
"I thank my lucky stars," McCaskell says. "I've been doing drugs since I was 16. Starting with pot, then the psychedelics and ecstasy, you know, as they came along I figured them out. But, somehow or other, I had this intuition around this one [meth] — I thought, maybe I don't want to do this right away."

Suddenly, the more I came to learn about [meth], not reading but through firsthand experience with the guys who started using. I see myself as in a really high-risk group for this, I'm sixty-seven. What would it be like to take something to make you feel incredibly horny and attractive and 20-years old again? That's really, really seductive. You can understand how, if you tried this once and suddenly you feel that, so you go back and try it again. It seems to take about two or three times. A friend of mine who lives down the street said that someone gave it to him. He said it was so wonderful and for the next two weeks if he had had any chance to score some more, if he had been around anybody that had offered it, he would have taken it again. It was two weeks of craving, two weeks to get over the craving; it was the top of the slippery slope. At that point, he said, he would never, never use it again because he knew how it made him feel and what his response would be. (McCaskell, interview)

McCaskell thinks he may have done meth once, about five years ago. "A guy I was with took out a pipe and I said 'no.'" Instead, he put a little bit of powder on his hand and offered it to McCaskell, to sniff it. "I did it and then he started fucking me. It was really, really beautiful. I never knew what exactly it was he gave me." I suggest that, based on the timeframe and approach, it might have been ketamine (aka "special K" or "K"). "I never knowingly used K," McCaskell replies. "GHB and stuff like that, but not K."

[Risk] can be part of the adventure. It's like in adventure movies; there is always immense risk and the ways we overcome of the risk, which is the gratification. (McCaskell, interview)

“So talking about the baths, that’s the risky stuff these days,” says McCaskell. “It’s not so much HIV, it’s about having your life completely destroyed by a drug that is becoming more and more common. There are counseling groups, and chats with people, and other harm reduction methods — but nobody is addressing people who have no idea what they are getting into and saying *don’t go there*. We need living ex-users or people trying to stop using doing PSAs that say MY LIFE IS A FUCKING MESS. PLEASE DON’T COME HERE.”



Simon Muscat, *A Return to Eden*: figurative study (artist’s instagram account); marble relief (2019); schematic diagram; marble relief detail

Muscat has, in recent years, turned the focus of his studio practice to work that engages with themes of sex and, important, intergenerationality, a sexually contentious and risky topic. In 2018, Muscat began work on *A Return to Eden*. Taking form first in drawings, then wax and bronze, *A Return to Eden* is currently under development as a marble relief (and maybe beyond). This work embodies a number of key elements that are critical to Muscat’s artistic and personal values and standards: formality of structure and design, explicit sexual content, intentional tension around intergenerational desire between men, and platonic beauty in male physique. This work, specifically, locates (and communicates) an important nexus of risk in practices of art and sex. “I was coming from a very innocent place,” Muscat claims. “When you create, you come from a place of innocence.”

Muscat's most recent understanding of the piece is that the men create a portal. "The child prevents us from entering by holding on to the [men's] penises," he states. "So, the way I see it now is that if you identify with the child, you are not allowed entry; and if you identify with the adults who are in relationship, you can pass through. The men are creating the portal and the child is preventing entry."

Talking with friends and associates about *Return to Eden*, Muscat claims that his Canadian colleagues are alarmed by the sexual riskiness of the work; that it will land him in trouble with both gallerists and the general public. In America, his friends and collectors have a completely different take — one that reflects the artist's sense of innocence. "Firstly, I knew, for myself, that it wasn't sexual," Muscat insists. "But prior to it being a portal and the child denying entry, it is about establishing a new identity of self."

As a gay person, I perceive myself—from the generation I come from—as a deviant within society. That was my perception of who I was. And I am attracted to young people — I do find them beautiful. The young person is appealing in so many ways. And as a decent human being, I stepped away from society because I could not interact with young people, as a deviant — I self-monitored. And through discussion with other people I have discovered other gay men who have literally stepped out of society and disengaged from their intimacy, their wanting to be around young people because they perceive themselves as deviants. (Muscat, interview)

Now, Muscat can talk about this issue because he trusts himself. "As a 40-year old, I still had not established a trust of who was I," he says. "I could not have done this piece as a 40-year old. Now, as a 60-year old, I have an element of trust — I know what I do, what I'm about." This is a story that Muscat has heard from other gay men.

Same story: they disengage. Basically the human being is a decent person. But because [older gay men can] take on this label of deviant, they step out of society and don't engage in this beauty that they actually do love and cherish. They haven't developed a trust. I was the same. I could go

deeper ... I remember going to visit some friends and their boy wanted to sleep with me, share a bed — which is a common thing. But I could not go there. The boy was to the point of puberty, so in my mind he was almost an adult. I could not have him in that vicinity primarily because I did not trust myself. Even though I would have loved to have that experience, I did not trust myself. (Muscat, interview)

Muscat insists that he is secure in himself and if someone sees the work in a derogatory way, he understands their response as an indication of “where they are coming from, that’s how they perceive. That’s not to be malicious, it’s a matter of [self] security.”

I can go into the symbolism: the men’s hands over the boy’s head are symbolic of sex — either going to the light or the dark. The men don’t engage in sexuality. The child is exploring sexuality but the men make it very formal, they are not engaging — they are accommodating but they are not engaging. The nice thing about the relief carving is that it gave me the means to produce a horizon, which was not part of the original equation. The horizon is in line with the boy’s sex. In other words, we are the same person but when we hit puberty we become someone else. The horizon is where the earth meets the sky — it’s part of the same world while also being two worlds. So I have a number of parallels going on: the men’s hands, the boy’s arms and hands stretched out, and the horizon line. I would like to explore these ideas further. So what happens? Here, you have a child—a person—who is quite free with their affections, the tactility of another human being. Then, puberty hits and suddenly, okay, something is different here, I can’t be touching you in the same way. (Muscat, interview)

From the perspective of risk, Black says “it’s pretty generative about whether you get the sex you want. To take the risks in order to get the pleasure you want.” She believes risk is not only about the consequences, “it’s also about risking the joy and putting yourself out there to actually access the sex that you want regardless of what the ‘consequences’ might be.” That aspect, she thinks, is rarely explored. “For many women,” Black continues, “it’s not safe to cruise for sex, or to do sex work, or to access sex work as a client. Or to be in sexualized spaces. If people

had more access to pleasure there would be less moralizing about what happens when you access pleasure.”

One of PrEP’s origins is as a preventative measure for women in African nations where saying “no” is not always an option. PrEP was considered in context with consent. Commenting on her experiential knowledge of sex and AIDS in Uganda, Karuhanga suggests, “conversations of consent are not the same there. Or how we think about courtship and relationships, it’s very different there.”

It’s interesting how that’s the beginning of PrEP when here it’s like a cocktail, a casual conversation. AIDS is not the death sentence I used to be, but it still—depending on the geographical context you are in—can deeply affect you in different ways. (Karuhanga, interview)

“PrEP is a tool for some people,” says Whitbread, adding, “definitely not the most important tool” (interview)

There was so much work and effort going into U=U. But PrEP took up so much conversational space within our queer circles and in the larger discourse. It was like, “take this as well,” and I couldn’t always get behind it — as a magic bullet. (Whitbread, interview)

Conversations about sexual health, HIV status, and PrEP are not, for many people convenient conversations — especially in sexually-charged moments. Yet, PrEP and sex in relation to living with HIV often comes down to being truthful and being able to trust people, sexual partners — especially in anonymous contexts: a kind of risky thing. “And the burden of that gets disproportionately placed on poz people,” adds Black. “Rather than being a shared conversation where truth is something that we build in relationships, like communication. Lots of what we experience just shifts the burden back onto poz people, to navigate systems, to prove themselves.”

I don't know about you but for me, I've always felt that the onus is with me to have the conversation, to disclose, otherwise there could be legal implications. In a sexual context, I am always looking for the window of opportunity to talk about my HIV status ... (Whitbread, interview)

Whitbread emphasizes that as a poz person, she has actually never had someone else bring it up. "I want to talk about sexual health," she says.

No one wants to talk about sexual health or make it easy. No one says, "I have herpes" or talks about their sexual health or what it means for two of us to be in an intimate, sexual moment ... it's not really a conversation. I think people are really like fingers-crossed taking risks in the moment, putting on blinders as to what taking risks really means and the implications of what risks might mean to the other person. If we're not going to have a conversation before we fuck, that risk to you might look differently but for me it might be a prison sentence. Risk is different to different people. (Whitbread, interview)

But the conversation around any object—for example, the object of risk—changes currency in relation to any given moment in time, and shifting values and intensifications around so-called progress. "For sure," says Black.

And the thing that has intensified in many ways is around the criminalization piece and the formalization of specific laws and cases and precedents. Why do people want to talk about PrEP for hours but they don't want to talk about laws — because laws are not sexy. It's so interesting what the pill allows people to take responsibility for, or not take responsibility for. (Black, interview)

"No one is going to ask you if you are HIV if you are at the glory hole," says Deen. He views "sex on the run, fast sex" as spaces where disclosure of PrEP and/or sti's are inconvenient. "MSM, men who are married and have kids and have so-called reputations within that episteme, who are the caretakers of that episteme," are particularly uncomfortable with sexual declarations.

The kinds of men that Arenas says, in his memoir, yield the best sex of all. We used to call it rough trade, people would go out of their way to find a

rough or dangerous boy. There is a culture around sex and danger. There are moments in history when writers like Arenas and Genet elevated encounters in very similar ways to how we are discussing the space of the disco. (Deen, interview)

In these ways, the PrEP/U=U landscape comes with its own risks in that it is a bit like putting blinders on: you become liberated in one sense but you become vulnerable to so many other things, sexually-speaking.

PrEP/U=U is also intrinsically tied to conversations and vexed practices of HIV (and sexual) criminalization). For Deen, the project of drawing moral demarcations is even more entrenched than this view that HIV disability is discursively organized (above). This entrenchment occurs in insurance policies, in legislations that make him sign such documents,

To ensure that my body can be tracked, so that my body is on record or part of a record or file or dossier in the event of infecting the masses, or putting my infection into other bodies as a result of nondisclosure during sex acts. Basically that introduces, in the most nefarious ways, the reach of the state into those glorious sweaty bellies of the disco, those glorious channels of what used to be the tubs, the bathhouses. Some of these spaces are making a small but important comeback in the backlash against [gay socio-sexual networking application] Grindr, in certain pockets of the population. (Deen, interview)

Deen believes that through HIV criminalization laws, “the state is able to reach into spaces that they didn’t really know about, for a period of time, or that they knew about through selective police raids, and lattices of violence and harassment, that would sort go with an ebb and flow of pinpointing out where certain queer geographies are,” he says.

Finding the coordinates to round up [gay men] in parks, in bathhouses, in urinals, in bathrooms—what Guy Hocquenheim would call “the pick-up machine,” the landscapes, the territories, the places of the pick-up machine. HIV colonization allows the State to bring their presence into spaces that are non-teleological, for oppositional reasons, for reasons that counter “x.” (Deen, interview)

How does the PrEP/U=U landscape figure into these kinds of coordinates? For Kelley, risk has become the locus around which some conversations of safety are taking place. “We forget that driving, walking, biking — all these things carry far more risk of injury, harm, death,” says Kelley. “The kinds of sex that someone might be having, consensually, with or without Truvada is kind of a non sequitur, I think.”

It’s just a matter of how people define risk for themselves. If we talk about [sex] in terms of risk, will they attach risk to that behaviour? Perhaps. But if we didn’t attach risk to that behaviour then would it just be *having sex*, and would it just be interactions as we go about our own ways of finding comfort and pleasure? Truvada obviously has a purpose and it’s important in the role it plays, and is a great means to avoid a very specific kind of transmission. I don’t know that it has to be the one piece that invalidates all other risk, or that creates and invites more risk. I think it’s just another piece. (Kelley, interview)

During our conversation together, Kelley describes an AIDS poster he recently saw. He starts with the headline: “Who is spreading HIV?”

Below that [headline], they had a small statistic basically saying that the people who aren’t testing [for HIV/AIDS] are spreading HIV, and this was kind of a backdoor conversation into “let’s put everyone on Truvada.” It’s that sort of continuum that it exists on that really I find is difficult because, yes, risk is involved in HIV, but as I said, if we start talking about it in terms of risk and only looking at it as a problematic or an exceptional circumstance around sex and HIV, then it will forever inhabit that. (Kelley, interview)

For Kelley, meeting people, communicating, and making a friend is risky.

Muscat questions the use of the work “risk” in context with PrEP. “If you have a safeguard, the drug, is that actual risk?” Muscat’s comment is reflected in Preciado’s term, “chemical condoms” (2019.127, in relation to PrEP).

I hate to think of pleasure in the realm of risk. When you take that jump — you jump knowing it’s going to be successful. Like, with [*Return to Eden*], I don’t think of the risk of it. The actual joy—it’s like someone who does a

jump or a loop. They have an innate confidence that they will make that loop. It looks risky, there's an aspect of that, but there's more of a confidence, "I'm going to make that loop, I'm going to make that jump." (Muscat, interview)

Muscat shares a story with me, about a friend who recently started taking PrEP. "I've interacted with him and when PrEP came along he asked me to organize a line-up just to take advantage of this [new situation]."

He wanted to be used, gang-banged. He wanted me to orchestrate this random fuck. That's part of the human psyche. He's a sweet guy, and intelligent guy — but there's something [there] that needs to be placated. My take is that as a child, the person was totally dominated. So now, they are an adult and they put themselves in a situation where they are totally vulnerable and have no control — but on some level they do have control. They've tied themselves up, or had themselves tied up and someone is going to do as they will [with them]. But [through PrEP] they are learning to control it now; it's their choice. I think our sexuality is based around these kinds of issues. (Muscat, interview)

Like McCaskell, Muscat likes to play "dad." "I waited until my fifties to fulfill my dream and play dad, and fulfill my sexual fantasies" Muscat reveals. The reason is, my father was often absent and I had to be my own dad. It's correcting, it's a balance of correction." Many of Muscat's playing dad include acts of tenderness: bedtime reading, tucking in, intimate conversation and assurances.

Theme II Summary

Ludic and radical and risky sexual ecologies are, in this section, (mostly) linked to bathhouses, saunas, the connections to capitalism, and the implications for queer people who are sexually active in public ways. McCaskell recounts the historical and continuing connections between MSM, queer sexual spaces, and capital, and the impacts that MSM income privilege have on

“traditional, straight dominated society” and the normative family unit. Hogan-Finlay’s mobile installation, *A/V Steam*, extracts the concept of the sauna out of exclusively MSM territory and offers the intimate benefits of steam to all genders and, in a challenge to capital, free of charge. Black and Whitbread talk about being sexual as a couple in public venues and events.

For Kelley, meeting people, communicating, and making a friend is risky. For Muscat, risky sex includes what happens when “you totally allow yourself to interact with a number of people.” This happens, for Muscat in and out of bathhouses and includes bars, discos, and darkrooms. Muscat’s emphasis is on relationships and personal concepts of responsibility. He is more concerned with people who are sexually active and indiscreet about it rather than safer sex protocols. For example, MSM who leave their private cabin doors open and assume a bent over “fuck me” position on the bed, their asses generously lubed and ready for an anonymous “cum dump.” McCaskell is also concerned about the status of safety in relation to meth use in communities of active MSM. He is seriously occupied with the absence of public and LGBTQI health messaging about meth use and sexual ecologies. He candidly wonders if harm reduction practices are enough for a city as large as Toronto, and if those practices carry a veil of privilege. Karuhanga, too, talks about privilege in Uganda, where conversations about consent are not the same as in Toronto. Courtship and relationships are also structured and performed in very different, harmful ways in relation to AIDS.

Black and Whitbread have created and directed many conversations about sex and PrEP and AIDS and sti’s through their individual and collaborative work. Privilege also plays a role in these discourses. Deen also talks about privilege and risky sex, noting the absence of discourse at gloryholes, sti’s are inconvenience, married and closeted men and their so-called reputations

within an episteme that they are also the caretakers of. Privilege and PrEP are also entangled, in this section, with sexual and HIV criminalization. Kelley talks about the ways that HIV testing (and its absence) accounts for transmission blame then, in turn, shifts the topic of conversation to PrEP (which is also an object of privilege in terms of access). Deen understands the links between criminalization and privilege is organized through the state and its capacity to “reach into” marginalized and queer spaces through police raids, violence, and harassment.

McCaskell expands his narrative on sexual ecologies to discuss so-called daddy culture in MSM communities. Similarly, Muscat’s observations on and cultural production about daddy culture and intergenerational relationships are vivid, visceral, and ethically guided.

Black’s primary concern is about getting the sex you want: “To take the risks in order to get the pleasure you want.” Black and Whitbread are also concerned about sexually active women who express their desires in more public ways, like sex parties. Black thinks that risk is not just consequential, it’s about joy and pleasure as a form of individual harm reduction and a method of reducing sexual moralizations.

Theme III: Art, Artistic Practice, and Risk

In the previous section about Sexual Ecologies, Muscat’s creative practice plays with risky undercurrents of sex and artistic practice itself when he processes his desires and puts his practice-based bottom line at risk. In these ways, Muscat, his practice, and material productions represent a crossfade between that section’s and the theme that guides this section.

I understand my dissertation as a space of interpretation, like the space that opens between the artist (composer, dancer, performer, writer) who creates from a position of

intention and the audience (listener, reader, viewer) who draws significance through the lens of cumulative personal experience. An important aspect of this space of interpretation is the ways it can be put to work: narrowed to exact the intended message being transmitted, or expanded to create a more interactive experience with and for the audience (or receiver).

The HIV Howler is an arts-driven project devoted to ongoing and emerging issues of HIV/AIDS. Co-curated and co-edited by Black and Whitbread (with an editorial committee), the newspaper takes risks to maintain measures of integrity and ethics. Black recounts how a colleague challenged her during an institutional event, asking her “where is the risk in this project?”

He was saying that he didn't think the project was risky. I felt there was a huge risk in starting a publication, there is a huge risk in being in an editorial committee that considers the issues involved: how a community perceives who takes up space and starts dialogue, and what kinds of dialogue. Where is the risk in publishing a limited edition art newspaper in multiple languages with contributors from all over the world, in one week for an international conference? Where is the risk in that!?! (Black, interview)

The HIV Howler represents a global community and, as Black confirms, risk looks very different in that context. “For example,” she says, “in Amsterdam, an image of a poz woman breastfeeding is perceived in different ways.

You try to have a global advisory committee that speaks multiple languages in five different time zones. Making this happen, trying to balance ideas and cultural beliefs, and having it not appear like most pretentious Western assholes. There are lots of conventions around editorial ethics — like who owns the rights to things, like copyright, and around collective work. Feminist publishing collectives of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s really tried to tease apart some of the power structures in, like, media — like what is the hierarchy in terms of what actually gets published, who are the gate-keepers, who has agency within the media in order to tell their story or actually just make work. (Black, interview)

According to Black, these issues become “super interesting when you move into a global context, and when you get into content that crosses across art, artists, writers, activism, and also people who just make art and write to survive.”

There is risk in doing things that challenge industrial complexes from multiple angles. You know, everybody loves *The Howler* on one level, but they also think it was really easy. Another risk in producing a newspaper is that people tend to just throw it away, or recycle it. But a benefit in making a newspaper is that there’s a promiscuity in what people can do with it — it can sit beside someone’s toilet, which is amazing, and it can also be in a museum archive library for one hundred year, which is also amazing. (Black, interview)

“Or it can be framed and hung in a doctor’s office in Trinidad,” Whitbread chimes in. “Or it can find its way into private archives,” I add, pointing to my experiential knowledge, and archival habit, “where it can sit undisturbed for long periods of time.” “Or someone can clip out a section or article and give it to someone else, or pin it up on the wall in their studio — there are so many options,” adds Black.

Whitbread recalls a project she did in collaboration with a colleague named Pablo, called *Full of AIDS*. “We would film ourselves doing different things,” she says. “It started when we went to a club and a guy asked about HIV strategies because he didn’t know much. So we both went online and on Grindr, trying to make fake dates and disclose, and filming ourselves having different conversations while recording.”

On one recording, we were lying in bed talking about risk and treatment — asking “are you on treatment to reduce the risk and for prevention, or are you on treatment for your health?” It was so interesting — the differences between “don’t worry, it’s okay, you can fuck me without condoms” versus “I want to be healthy and have a higher CD4 count and live my life.” It was an interesting conversation and we both agreed that we are on treatment so that we could have an easier conversation and have great sex. (Whitbread, interview)

Important to the conversation of art and risk are framings of artistic practice, such as career versus calling. Talking with Belcher, I ask him what is riskier: artistic career (and the possible commercial rewards) or art practice as a personal calling? "Oh, definitely following the calling," he replies without pause. "If I had taken seriously the logic back in my twenties that you can take one tangent over towards stability and work towards a career within the working corporate world. I wish I had done that; it's not what I did." I ask him to consider the so-called risk of corporate life as a form of enslavement or servitude. "Once you've been out on your own," replies Belcher, "you can totally appreciate things like a salary, dental insurance, and just knowing that every fourteen days you are back at it again."

So what compelled Belcher to return to his artistic practice after a twelve-year hiatus? "I do feel like it is what I am supposed to be doing," he says. "It's an outlet and possibility for me."

I'm at the age where I don't have property or savings — and I'm not of the age where I can get a decently salaried job, at least for any amount of time. So if I'm going to be functional and able to care for myself at all, in another ten years, it's going to be because I am treading water in the art world. It really is my only option at this point. (Belcher, interview)

For Belcher, the risk is in knowing that what he is doing can fall apart completely. "At this point, I'm doing better all the time because of the risks."

The risk can also be seen as a gamble. I am on an incline and I am getting constant shows and better shows. But I am competing in a much more complicated art world than what I knew before. It's not just more competition for attention, there are just so many more artists in the world. And now it's very suspect, as in cartels that get together and promote certain bodies of work.

It's a little disillusioning, when you see the underbelly and the way that things do work. But from my experience of being an art dealer, I knew way back when that there was a certain approach that one could take, of just making repetitive work over and over that eventually people would recognize and finally understand, and then it would just roll over on itself. But then, I didn't think that was an honorable way to go. I am conscious

that, yes, I do work in series or what I would even think of as seasonal collections, which makes it hard for people to keep up with what I am doing. I do understand that I have taken that avenue and that position, which is a risk itself. If I had just stuck with making the luggage works back when, I'd be flying high right now. (Belcher, interview)

What, then, does risk look like? "In the basic sense: the next show," says Belcher. "As much as they say 'you're only as good as your last show,' that's how you have to approach your next show, as though it's your last show." Belcher's comment resonates, for me. In the pre-treatment AIDS era, many gay men—myself included—believed that every day might be the last.

You need to put as much into every show as you can. Even if it's a funky show at a friend's place, I need for it to speak as much as I can within that opportunity. Because you don't know if you are going to be around after that, to do another show. It's not so much that you don't know if you are able or allowed to do another show — you don't know if you're around to do another show. I hate to think about it this way, but my major risk is that I won't have money. I know that part of my risk is that, yes, I do consciously make different work all the time — and I know that's not the easy way. (Belcher, interview)

I asked Muscat what risk looks like in his creative practice. "Risk looks like opportunity. I am given an opportunity and through that risk, I get to know who I am. Risk looks like 'Hello Simon!' I'm discovering who I am."

Muscat places a trust in the universe at the centre of his thinking about risk and artistic practice. "The way I live my life is in always trusting the universe," he confides. "For example, when I'm excited, I know it's the path to take. If I'm depressed, I step back — I don't take action."

Ultimately, before I die the one thing I would like is the confidence that the universe is always there for you, the universe is always out there for your best interests. Ultimately, it's for your own good. It's about developing the tools. (Muscat, interview)

"I think about religions," Muscat adds. "They can be so cockamamie. And those are supposed to be the tools to deal with life and reality. Art is a real tool."

Society has so many misconceptions of types, of people. We have misconceptions of cops, politicians, rich people, poor people, and the starving artist. Dropping those associations is important. I like to think of businessmen as creative — juggling money, making money. I guess creating is just about trying to discover who you are. (Muscat, interview)

I ask Muscat to speak to his work, *Return to Innocence* (2013). The work directly addresses sex, the male body, and intergenerationality. “It’s a marble piece with two boys connected at their sex. This was the first piece [created] outside of my design practice, like carving corner pieces,” he explains.

When I did [*Return to Innocence*], it was so transformative, within myself, I had never experienced making something that changed who I was. I had never experienced that. I was used to making work that used all of my understanding and education about what makes work appealing. Here was a piece that was not about being appealing. It was transformative. It’s about innocence and it gave me back my own innocence. (Muscat, interview)

“Every time I feel lost, I go to a gallery to find my centre,” Muscat says. “In the morning, I look at art and I find my centre. Like Ono’s statement about the absence of complexity and the direct experience,” he says.

I asked Karuhanga if she is consciously aware of taking risks in her creative practice.

“Yes,” she replies without missing a beat. “I think the most affective, the most profound, the strongest work in the world are things that are disarming.”

It’s work that is confusing when you encounter it. That’s what I love about Shan Kelley’s work, or Felix Gonzales-Torres ... the most iconic work we look at ... it’s about breaking things down through signifiers and symbols, as a way to sort of unfold or break-open. The break-open gestures are really important. For me, risk is like trepidation, anxiety, tension. (Karuhanga, interview)

Karuhanga recalls a mentor asking her if she ever gets lost in making of art. “It’s basically that that space is where things start to happen,” she says, “when you get lost.”

It's not the same as having a crisis of faith, where you cannot produce anything, like you're a mess. But allowing for lostness — it's where art and risk unfurls and unfolds. I love that idea and I feel that it can also translate outside of art-making — into relationships, for example. Think about the moment where you are so in love with someone that you can no longer go on not saying that ... there's a moment where you just have to go places with this person. That can be in the most beautiful, love ways or it can be a very difficult conversations or conflict. To me, risk emerges in so many different facets of my life. (Karuhanga, interview)

When it comes to art-making, Karuhanga doesn't ever actually want to feel safe. "I've been that way since I was young," she recalls. "I was always naturally good at drawing to the point where it became boring to me."

Then, when I was in school I realized that I already knew how to paint and draw, so I started to do sculpture or metal work — I would just do stuff that was deathly terrifying to me. If anyone ever challenges me, I'm an Aries, I'll be like "You're telling me I can't do this? Well, I'm going to try!" In my practice, I'm not a formally trained dancer or filmmaker ... I didn't formally study any of these things in school. But I do watch lots of film, and I read a lot. For me, there's power in being an artist and using these different gestures. Self-articulation becomes very important. (Karuhanga, interview)

Karuhanga believes there is something in risk that we associate with danger, but it's pleasurable.

You come out the other side very euphoric or cathartic or powerful. And when we get a distance from it, it seems so small — but then you get thirsty-hungry for more of those experiences. It may not be an everyday thing. Once it becomes everyday, it becomes banal. I feel that risk is like a climax, an intense moment. (Karuhanga, interview)

For Deen, his poetry practice is a space to work through ideas of HIV and related disability through the lens of queerness, which he frames as another genealogy (above). "There are many problematics around all of that," he says, "and I don't really know how to discuss it in a way that isn't alarmist. But it is kind of a dread that I see in my brain when these issues come up."

A poetry practice is really about negotiating these kinds of ideas through queerness, and through a body. If I read my body as infected, I read that

infection as part of the boundlessness or bounty of ... I'm trying to find ways of reclaiming or staging certain kinds of reclamations around the politicization of my HIV-positive body. (Deen, interview)

Deen does not find radical poetry practices, especially radical queer poetry practices, that are invested in what it means "to push it away, push it all the fuck away."

To clear the space out, without apology in order to get to the work that we need to perform to save our lives and the lives of populations that matter to us — such as the populations with which we are historically targeted. A poetry practice that really is about this kind of pushing back, pushing away, it can't live in any institution, it can't live in a festival. God bless the people who organize poetry and literary festivals, but it still is a canon, it's still someone's personal canon because someone programs festivals, with juries, to decide who gets to stand on stage for 10 or 15 minutes. If poetry gets invited for the evening, great! Poetry should go! But that space can't hold a certain kind of poet — the poet I'm talking about is the poet we are all talking about in our conversation. It can't be held in that space, it can't be held in the university space, which is actually one of institutional spaces where poetry does live because it is taught and it is celebrated and it is understood — and for the most part, it is welcomed. But not when it starts to trouble the institution's boundaries around itself and the territories around disciplines and the parameters that people set around their disciplines. I actually think that a poetry practice has to be free, it has to exist anywhere in any space in any time. (Deen, interview)

Kelley has been involved in public art making, graffiti, and DIY punk aesthetics in community organization and involvement. After his diagnosis to HIV-positive, Kelley became less interested in street art or making a name for the sake of making a name: it became something more cathartic.

I saw art as an interesting way to encapsulate that creative energy toward different solutions. I wasn't ready to take the step toward identifying as poz or queer. At one point, I was more interested in trying to speak about my own experience for part of those cathartic reasons, I think, and realized that I could not take myself out of the equation. I don't feel comfortable trying to speak for all voices, but it's easier to own my own voice. There was a level of protection that that afforded me. (Kelley, interview)

Telling his own story gave Kelley a certain license to feel more secure, especially at a time when everything is highly mediatized. “There are various platforms that talk often about very personal and intimate details, whether we are ready to talk about it or not,” Kelley asserts. “It was easier to start to use my own experiences with HIV as an influence for my artwork. I’m not sure which came first, but the two became very entangled.” Kelley’s post-diagnosis work has been intertwined with HIV and the story of AIDS because it’s been a big part of his life. “So much so,” he adds, “that everything is through that lens. Whether it’s directly related to HIV, it’s always going to be through that lens.”

In the era of the new chronic, miracle and temporal displacement run parallel, a shared movement that affects the lived experiences of life and death for people living with HIV and other chronic conditions. Kelley thinks AIDS industry and media outreach “have become a big part of the ways that people talk about disease.” This messaging is reflected in the ways that

Service providers, doctors, and law enforcement talk about how chronic infectious, blood-borne pathogens are managed. That’s incredibly frightening because it is revisiting that entire idea of infection, infectiousness, and viral class. As programs ramp up to secure ideas of treatment, what happens to those people who do not participate in those programs, who cannot be or have no interest in being a participant? What happens to the autonomy of the individual in making choices for themselves? How does that fit toward an idea of cure? Should be the focus of government, or of anybody to try and manage that for us. It’s really complicated and messy, and very scary. (Kelley, interview)

Kelley spoke with me about his series *With Curators Like These* (2015-present), referring to the individual works as aphoristic text paintings. “It’s not a new idea to use text in that way, and my formatting is almost identical.”

Jenny Holzer used text in ways that are very similar, there is no focus on embellishment in the text. I do that too. There’s also Ed Ruscha — with

similar fonts [and] as little embellishment as possible. I've tried to personalize my work with different, intimate, and autobiographical details and biological traces of myself, such as hairs, blood, semen — things that are otherwise invisible, unless disclosed. (Kelley, interview)

When comparing the text work of Kelley with Holzer or (Ed) Ruscha, the difference is the subject matter. Kelley attempts to strip down the ideas of what the work is really about. "I like playing along the lines of double-entendres," Kelley says, "to offer a means that people can interpret something different, other than reading a piece about HIV/AIDS."

I wanted to address the absence of that space in art, a space that recognizes that deep history of artists who have been or are currently affected by AIDS. It's interesting how that is consistently relevant with processes of curation or the new rise of what we are seeing, a new rise in interest in identity-art and art collected by certain groups that are often passed over. (Kelley, interview)

Hogan-Finlay addresses issues of risk in her collaborative artistic practice. Focusing on some of the projects she has done, she suggests "there can be risks in terms of some of the sites where the work is presented — we never know who's going to wander into the gallery, the trailer, the performance. That's where the work is because those connections, those interactions, those surprises that are sometimes difficult or challenging — those are sites where risk can happen." Much of the work she produces is intervention-based and social practice — "there are so many unknowns—you don't know who is going to wander into your space and what that's going to look like."

As above, Belcher's practice is, in many ways, an exercise in risk-taking. "I basically say it's always a gamble," Belcher confesses. "That's actually what the last body of work was addressing—the oil derricks."

I didn't want people confusing that it was somehow about oil, or striking oil, or striking it rich — it was a representation of that machine, that drive,

that routine, that vicious circle. It wasn't about Texas or Oklahoma — it was more about Los Angeles where you see separate [derricks] in a vacant lot and you just somehow feel that some guy went out on a limb and borrowed his last 30 thousand dollars to buy this machine because he somehow felt that there was something in there. For me, all those qualities of gamble, desperation, hope — that's what it takes for me to put that sucker up on the wall. (Belcher, interview)

I engage Dean in conversation about pleasure, his creative practice, and the ways that risk can be understood as transformative action. Deen draws connections between the creative risks inherent in practices of drag and poetry. "I've always felt that there's a whole world of drag that doesn't get recognized as [transformational]," he says.

I started to think about these things at a time when I was obsessed with Nan Goldin, and I would watch the film, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, which is obviously titled from the VU song. I watched that film over and over again, and one of the most incredible moments is when Goldin interviews a friend who is a Parisian body builder. When he opens his mouth, he is the sweetest, the most femme. And he is the most gorgeous man ever, and this spirit is coming out of this body that is of Atlas proportions. He talks about his body, and the building of his body, as a form of drag. And I've always thought about what it means to put on poetry, rather than write poetry. I've always scribed poetry as my make-up, as my decoration, as my ornamentation — taking my cues from the men coming out of the river in Arenas, in Spender, that this just feels right, there's no need to reason out what feels *in flow*. (Deen, interview)

"Those are my personal reflections around poetry and risk, around poetry and transformation," Deen states. "It's a space that I don't really think I have the language yet to take myself into why it is, why the poems. It's *in the flow*, it's compulsive, it's necessary — and if I don't do it then I don't feel like I'm living."

In practices of art and sex what are the potential relationships, powers, or escapes that risk presents?

The potential is to recognize the possibilities in transformativity, and not necessarily to moralize or qualify the tools, the methods, the instruments,

the roads through which we achieve states of intoxication or transformation or metamorphosis, and the pleasures of that. Some people might say, 'Oh Faizal, now you're talking about pleasure for pleasure's sake.' What's wrong with that? Why is that even a question? (Deen, interview)

Deen and I share love of—and have personal histories with—disco musics and cultures. Deen is no stranger to drug use and forms of ludic time and play that are common in disco, house, and gay socio-sonic spaces in general. I ask him about his experiences with drugs and disco, both at home in the Caribbean and in his life in Canada.

Disco does represent that collective force of bodies in celebration, in libation, in drunkenness, in drugs, in laughter, in intelligence, in sharing, and in community-building. Disco represents an oppositional collective space to the kinds of politics that really reflect a certain kind of optimism, I guess you could say, around who and what constitutes man/human identity. Disco as a mass of bodies in that kind of carnivalesque space, in that kind of over-turning, that to me is very much is a space that interrogates that kinds of spaces that we journey through, that we negotiate, that we live in, in order to survive economically, socially, spiritually. That space has meant something completely different to shifting generations, as we have witnessed certain gains made in terms of collective as well as individual, sexual, erotic liberation — or the liberation of energies that we coalesce under the term “queer.” (Deen, interview)

Deen tries to problematize the movement of some terminology used in Western spaces. “When I am in a Western space, which I am of as much as I am of the Caribbean, Guyanese, Trinidadian, and Jamaican spaces that I claim as my Caribbean spaces,” he says, “the meaning of those kinds of collective spaces of the disco shift.” The meanings of the shift are, for Deen, dependent on the generation, dependent on the space, dependent on the political and social gains attached to those generational shifts and he looks to “the principle of release of eroticism within which we perform the work of community-building, where we perform the work of

community system, where we build alliances at least at a time that transgress certain racial, economic, geographic lines.”

I really do see the gorgeous, sweaty belly of the disco as a place of riot action. I've always seen it as a place of the greatest, the most maximum of tasteful riots imaginable, where energies are so invested in the celebration of the release of bodies, that to attack a disco or to infringe upon any determined, hard-won space or organizing body, if those spaces are infringed upon you have to be prepared for a range of responses — like Stonewall, like Sex Garage. (Deen, interview)

“That space,” he continues, “comes out of so much struggle that to compromise it could be akin to violence. What I'm trying to say here is that there was a period of time where I understood more militant responses to homophobia, and I understood the connections to those militant responses in relation to what it means to preserve spaces of beauty. What is celebrated or condemned as a collection of vulgar bodies is, for me, about the politics of beauty.”

The disco sequences described in many of Deen's poems—especially in the anthology, *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing From the Antilles* (2008)—represent reversals of eroticisms of submission and surrender — representations that risk the personal. “Within Judeo-Christian texts, as well as Islamic practice,” Deen states, “submission is read as the ultimate offering of yourself to that, sort of, patriarchal force.

When I rest myself at the foot of the king on his throne of cocks, to recombine images from the book, I am talking about the celebration of disco as a pagan space, as a place that allows you to go out into the world and identify your gateways of spirit beyond those atomistic, kind of enlightenment, heteronormative models of the closed concept of man/human. So I really view unleashed homosexuality, unleashed queerness, unleashed bodies — I really view those practices and moments as pushing us toward a time when we can be human after Man. I borrow these tropes from a remarkable Jamaican intellectual named Sylvia Wynter. (Deen, interview)

Deen understands the disco is a natural affair, “to temper the troubles of the term—natural—it’s a natural affair for a young, queer boy who is fully coming into sexuality.” For Deen, this starts with the discos in the 1980s. Ten years later, it was the jump-up spaces, fête spaces, and then the replication of those spaces in his journey into Montreal in one of what he describes as “the last golden ages, in the mid-1990s, which is a really remarkable time for me, and for many people who were alive at night, in Montreal in the 1990s.”

“I come into the Western space already with a culture of bacchanal, of culture of carnival, a culture of those kinds of riotous celebrations,” he says. Within those carnivalesque moments and celebrations in the Caribbean, Deen understands the ways spaces open up for queerness in deeply personal ways, spaces that typically are not discussed when Western media paints Caribbean spaces as homogenously homophobic.

As a reflection of radical gay sex practices of the 1970s, “Love To Love You Baby” was a hit (especially in socio-sonic spaces organized by and for gay men). These sensations and expressions carry over into “I Feel Love” in perhaps more subtle ways, in terms of the track’s language, but Moroder’s influential sequence in the recording demonstrates profound evidence and ephemera of recombinant or nonteleological momentum. “This is it,” says Deen. “To feel love as a radical affect, in the sense that it can be given to you from so many spaces, in and of themselves, exceed the boundaries of the possible.”

When you take “Love to Love You Baby” together with “I Feel Love,” then flash forward ten years to Lil Louis and “French Kiss,” you see the repetition in recombination, or in the recombinant. It’s not just a repetition of sameness. In the act of repeating through the recombinant, you always have another layer of the same but it’s the *essence* of something that is being repeated. It really does entrance, in intoxicating ways. It takes you up, it brings you down, it takes you up, and it brings you down. Those rhythms reflect what it means to live in the world, especially

in bodies—my body, your body, the bodies that I recognize in relation to Wynter: those of us who exist on the margins of the circle.

That's obviously not good enough for us, so we make our own centre. In the disco, it doesn't matter to me that I might be marginal, that the disco might be hidden away, that it might be in a certain part of town. In the dancehall space, none of that matters because we are all centred. Music, then, that particular music becomes more than just a soundtrack of worship, it becomes the gateway of worship, it actually becomes worship, which is a more precise way of talking about it. (Deen, interview)

Deen illustrates these sensations with an example from Reinaldo Arenas's memoir *Before Night Falls*, where the writer is a boy and he has his first awakening of his homosexuality in an image of a group of men bathing, naked, in a river.

It is so fascinating — the repetition of that image in gay writing, across cultures, across racial and class lines. The men emerging from the river, in Arenas, and in my work the image of men emerging from the ocean — that this pleasure is not coming from the limits of a god-figure, from a bounded patriarchal space. This pleasure is coming from a place that you cannot measure, which is the bounty of the natural and what is right. Of course, that is an essentializing gesture, but I would actually defend that impulse, because I actually do not think it is. Because it cannot be charted, because it is boundless, means that it is bigger than essences, in that sense. It doesn't matter where it comes from — my poetry practice is not about accounting for where queerness comes from in the sense that I understand that we can make more definite, scientific arguments about genetic encoding of queerness. I know that there are people who are trying to do those kinds of things, but I think it's nefarious. I think they are doing those kinds of things so that they can institute a certain kind of eugenics practice. (Deen, interview)

In terms of working through what he describes as his own biomyth, or his own "process of a necessary romanticization around queerness, around brownness," disco plays a really important role. "The stages in that evolution are held in that music," he says, adding, "I can access that music and I can pray in that music."

Thinking about the vast musical territories from his time in Montréal really excites Deen — including the many memories that, on the surface, may appear as random or disconnected;

years when he was E-tripping. He recalls a six hour set by DJ Angel Moraes at a Montréal club when, as Deen puts it,

Moraes was really on fire and he took us on a journey through our drugs. I remember what happened at six a.m., exactly at six a.m. He turned all of the lights on. Nothing could be hidden in that moment, at six a.m. And without mixing, without any tricks, he put on [Michael Jackson's] 'Billie Jean,' and came on the dance floor and danced to 'Billie Jean' with us. Even sharing that story with you is giving me those goose bumps that people talk about. I feel these prickly points of pleasure and absolute possession in that memory. We all have these kinds of stories and memories that are not simply anecdotes. (Deen, interview)

In this way, the disco can be understood as a so-called "safe space." But that term is problematic, especially in relation to art, risk, and education.

I asked Black and Whitbread, "what is the status of safe?" "I don't think safe even exists," exclaims Whitbread immediately. "I don't either," says Black.

It's interesting, because using the word "transmission" in the title of *The Howler* we are trying to change the way transmission actually is used as a word: transmission from a point of publishing, from a point of ideas, from a point of movement across borders. Transmitting a communiqué ... that it's powerful and democratic about creating access. Risk is another one of those words — risk can be super sexy, it can be super stigmatizing. Safety is from that same exact category, because safety has been coopted in a certain way as well. (Black, interview)

"Safe space," Whitbread murmurs softly. "Safe space," Black exclaims loudly.

If I go to this event, am I going to be safe? If I participate in this community consultation, can I be guaranteed that it's going to be a safe space? I think that the idea of safety originated from community as a powerful concept that came out of dialogue about how we can access the sex that we want to have. Lots of people explored BDSM because it was "safer" than having certain forms of sex. (Black, interview)

Safety is like a moment of reprieve, for Karuhanga. "It's like okay, let's pause for a moment," she says.

I remember when “safe space” became a thing, for me. I really noticed it when I was doing my MFA. It’s so temporal. How can it not—like joy and other emotions—be temporal? For me, safety is like a temporal moment that is so context-specific. It’s so nuanced. Safety looks different from one moment or relationship to another. I’m okay with that. I also feel that, in this world, when you are in any way at the margins or the intersection of multiple margins—if you’re a gay male, if you’re a trans woman of colour—whatever your being in the world is ... it complicates all of that, it’s all context specific and temporal. We’re talking about safety and the assumption is that that means what’s comfortable or what’s good — but I always wonder, who gets that all the time? (Karuhanga, interview)

Karuhanga thinks there needs to be pleasure involved. “If it’s art, or sex, or a dance — pleasure is a part of it,” she maintains. “The more I think about it, a lot of that happens in risky situations that feel very unsafe. If you’re always safe then what’s your purpose here. Life is a risky thing.”



Ron Athey: detail from *Solar Anus*, performance (2006); Andre Serrano: *Alessandra* (1995); *Limbs* (2012)

Question of safety, now, have radically morphed for Black. “Safety originates from a very ingenious kind of community response,” she says, “as a space where oppressions can be addressed with the goal of minimizing barriers to access.” Moreover, Black understands the ways that safety has come to represent processes of power where one person’s image of safety is another’s space of risk and precarity.

The thought of safe space being something where we try to address oppressions to minimize barriers to access is a great concept, however

now we have this concept of safety that also comes from a really deeply conservative place where we are just trying to control all the variables to minimize the possibility that something creative, interesting, risky, weird, unquantifiable, unqualifiable could happen. And that's where art and cultural practice and production and activism hit their most interesting part — when we move past the idea of safety and move toward something like agency or bravery or engagement. All of those things actually happen on a spectrum. Sometimes we feel really good about the work that we do, and we feel safe, but a lot of the time, when you are pushing the edge of something, it doesn't feel safe. I think it depends on how the word safe is being used. I think there is no safe space. I think that we have to be careful about under whose definition of safety are we really operating. And that maybe the illusion of safety that is created for some is really a powerful denial of safety for others, or a powerful denial of other things that allow us to get to the juicy stuff. (Black, interview)

Black works in an institutional university setting and understands the deeper connotations and lived and pedagogical experiences in relation to so-called "safe space." She shares an experience of screening films, for queer students that show powerful histories of performance art — for example, documentation of Ron Athey performances or photographs by Andre Serrano. "Those are people who have recently entered into canonical status," says Black about Athey and Serrano, "as bad boys and girls or people who are pushing the envelope around censorship, risk, and safety."

But you show that work in art history class and suddenly there are complaints that students' rights are being infringed upon because they were made to watch a really challenging work. The conditions for safety are also about limiting the conversations to things that don't challenge us. In a media sphere where there is so much filtering of content and selective access to things that might support your own worldview, how do we get exposed to things that are challenging and exciting? (Black, interview)

Black recounts her experience in the early 1990s, as a 16-year old, trying to order a copy of Pat Califia's book of short erotic stories, *Macho Sluts* (1988). It was in the middle of the censorship wars and the book kept getting stopped at the border. Black's bookstore didn't fully

explain the extreme level of detail that was going on behind the scenes, but she finds it politically intriguing that certain authority could define what is considered appropriate, what is considered safe, what is considered risky — and that that book, or idea, or artwork could be prevented from moving across borders. “That is why publishing—and art—is helpful,” Black insists.

Theme III Summary

There is considerable slippage between the four central themes that I use to organize my dissertation, and these slippages are most evident in the theme of art, artistic practice, and risk — and the significance of art and music and dance in this project. In this section, I talked about art as a space of interpretation. This harkens back to the (mis)interpretation of Belcher’s *Kill Me* project and the blurring of lines between AIDS and mental health. Mental health and wellbeing is also explored by Black and Whitbread’s independent AIDS activist publication *The HIV Howler*, where creative, editorial, narrative, and pragmatic challenges are common, gendered, pressured, and also (mis)interpreted in different ways. Black and Whitbread classify creative and activist independent publishing as risky, promiscuous (slippage), counter industrial, editorially complex (more slippage), and hyper interdisciplinary. They also talk about what an editorial- and community-organized independent global print project offers to art as a means of survival — for example, HIV-positive writers who write to survive.

For Belcher, it’s about aesthetic self-creation: he feels like art is what he is supposed to be doing despite the economic and affective risks: “It’s an outlet and possibility for me.” Muscat, who is in the same generation as Belcher (and me) shares a similar overview: risk looks like opportunity. Whether a “calling” or a “real tool,” artistic practice and risk are entangled and

ongoing. Karuhanga, too, understands the essential role of risk in art and artistic practice: risk is a creative space where things start to happen. Like Muscat, Karuhanga blurs the lines between art, religion, and what she calls “a crisis of faith.” She imagines art and risk *unfurling* in valuable and productive ways through experiences of lostness (spirit). *When it comes to art-making, Karuhanga doesn't ever actually want to feel safe.* She associates risk to danger *and* pleasure.

When Bolton sings “my body is on record,” he also alludes to art, artistic practice and the risks inherent in documenting (recording) the personal. For Deen, his poetry practice is about negotiating his ideas through queerness and through a body. He is trying to reclaim or stage “certain kinds of reclamations” around the politicization of his HIV-positive body. In Kelley’s experiential art practice, his HIV-positive body is a conduit, a site of catharsis and unlikely forms of self-traumatization. Throughout, his body is on record. AIDS has been a big part of his life and the (risky) ways he uses his body in his art and artistic practice: “everything is through that lens. Whether it’s directly related to HIV, it’s always going to be through that lens.”

Hogan-Finlay also uses her art to start conversations about bodies, especially queer sexual and/or collaborative bodies. For her, the work is *because* of those connections and interactions and the risky surprises—sometimes difficult and challenging—that can emerge and provoke. Deen understands these connections and interactions as transformative and necessary: “It’s *in the flow*, it’s compulsive, it’s necessary — and if I don’t do it then I don’t feel like I’m living.” In this necessity lie the seeds of individual harm reduction.

The disco and other concepts (and critiques) of safe space emerged in this section. Black and Whitbread both question whether safe space even exists. Safety, for Karuhanga, is a reprieve, a temporal pause: “Safety looks different from one moment or relationship to

another.” Disco, often heralded as a safe site of celebration and resistance for MSM and the broader LGBTQI community is hard won. Whitbread imagines the disco and community as a site of HIV sexual liberation in *No Pants No Problem*. Deen imagines the disco as multivalent, a collective force of bodies in celebration, intoxication, drugs, laughter, intellect, and community-building. He also uses the social, economic, and spiritual images of the disco as a map to so-called real life. The political, community, and individual importance of the disco (as safe space) is so important to Deen that he insists the disco is the outcome of immense struggle *to achieve* safe space and to compromise the disco is “akin to violence.”

The disco, its musics and cultures, are vital to the art and artistic practice in my dissertation, and the foregrounding role that music takes. When Deen talks about “I Feel Love” and the role of repetition in creative practice (especially poetry), that conversation and “I Feel Love” in particular resurface representationally in the bass synth part of my audio work, “Intergenerational Crystal Ball.”

Theme IV: HIV/AIDS, Its Intersections and Risky Representations

Life is very short, which you recognize as an artist — especially for any of us who have gone through the AIDS era. —Alan Belcher, interview.

HIV/AIDS, its intersectionalities (including race, gender, age, disability, and class), and the complex and contradictory connections to stigma, shame, disclosure, criminalization, and representations are central to my dissertation. As a white, male, older queer-identified artist living with HIV, my lived and creative experiences can be understood as a watermark on my skin, on my life. The audio intervention, in particular, expresses many of these facets—and participant

ideas and statements—to work as a two-fold form of material analysis and activist-cultural production.

The history of art, activism, and HIV/AIDS represents a critical turning point in the ways that the arts-driven movement affected serious social, political, and medical change. Art and its activist connections continue to push against AIDS, and biopolitical and neoliberal managements and investments of the virus in an era of AIDS industry. Specifically, AIDS art and activism have been important tools in narratives around HIV/AIDS, and public understanding and engagement with these narratives.

“There are several intersecting stigmas that go along with the HIV/AIDS conversation,” states Karuhanga. “Some are queer, or maybe specifically gay-male narratives, and then predominantly Black and Latino maybe disenfranchised kinds of community ... there’s that kind of conversation. And then,” she continues, “many conversations around AIDS and its relationship to the [African] continent. Uganda is one of the nation states that comes up a lot in that conversation.”

AIDS directly and intimately touches Karuhanga’s life. Her father lost many friends, including his best friend, to HIV. He lost his sister, Karuhanga’s aunt, to HIV. It is Karuhanga’s statement, about her aunt that appeared in her *Poster Virus* work — and her reading is included in *Soft Subversions*.

From a very young age I’ve had this awareness, [AIDS has] never not been in my periphery sight lines and sometimes the foreground. When some people assume that it only affects some people, like queer people, I have never positioned myself that way. It’s always something that has been entwined with my thinking about sexuality, and sex life, and everything. Even though I do not live as someone who is HIV-positive, it’s still intimately part of my life. I cannot imagine, I don’t know any other way where I wouldn’t care about where that conversation is ... or where we are

in research, or where we are in intimate conversations and caring spaces about gentleness — it's part of that work for me. Even when that people say, "AIDS is over," you cannot undo the history of loss or people who are still living with HIV. Even if a cure came tomorrow, we can't reposition it or put a lid on it, like you've closed the book and put it on the shelf ... and it's over. It can't be that way. (Karuhanga, interview)

Karuhanga imagines a time in our lifetime, "if humanity isn't over by then, where we will say there was this illness that existed for a long time," she says. I'm very wary of thinking that way. There are erasures that happen in that way." How she positions herself is as someone who participates in rallies but she does not see herself as an AIDS activist, per se. "I'm not involved in the front lines of that work," she admits. "That needs to be acknowledged. But that doesn't mean I am not involved in other ways."

I think that there are types of work that are ingenuitive, one-on-one conversations. I think about all the different illnesses that people I care about live with. Sometimes it's just ... quite literally, innately, and spiritually like holding each other — one on one. I'm quite good at that type of work. Whether it's my lovers, my friends, my cousins, my chosen family — that's the way I try to show up. (Karuhanga, interview)

As an HIV-negative individual, Hogan-Finlay's voice is also crucial in discourses of AIDS and she has used this voice in numerous collaborative projects that raise awareness about LGBTQI oppressions, and homo- and AIDS-phobia. Through the work she started doing with the Third Leg Collective (with Logan Macdonald and Ginger Brooks Takahashi), she began to interrogate narratives around HIV/AIDS through a poster project that was supposed by a grant that Cecilia Berkovic received (to work with artists). According to Macdonald's website, the collective facilitates as a response to help dispel queer stereotypes and confront internalized homophobia through a shared art practice that includes a focus on exhibitions, the dissemination of information, and creation of artist multiples (via drawings, artist books, text,

and posters) (MacDonald 2006). “The project was called *Welcome to Gayside*,” Hogan-Finlay says. “We were drawing together one night and Logan shared a story with us about a town in Newfoundland, which is where he is from, that had been called Gayside. In 1985, at the height of the AIDS crisis, the town unanimously voted to change its name from Gayside to Gaytona — in a gesture to distance itself from any connections to gayness.” That moment was pivotal in the collective’s collaborative practice and they started to look at ways to explore that narrative. “We ended having a coming-out party for Gayside in St. John’s at Eastern Edge [Gallery],” Hogan-Finlay continues, “including film screenings and a poster that we circulated in a variety of formats, including *LTTR* [a trans-feminist publication] and through Cecilia’s channels in Toronto in different iterations.” Hogan-Finlay sees *Welcome to Gayside* as igniting her interest in working with the archives and starting to “unpack narratives that circulate happenstantially through conversations in art and queer groups, and then looking more deeply at those and ways to reinterpret them and express them usually in visual formats.”

I ask Belcher about the often-made links between AIDS and his series, *Kill Me*. “As much as I’ve been approached by some people who thought that the work was about me having HIV/AIDS and wanting a quick out,” says Belcher, “it was never about that, for me. It was about work being misinterpreted. “It was just a public announcement about suicidal depression,” Belcher claims. Instead of adding to historical narratives of AIDS, Belcher was, with *Kill Me*, addressing depression, a condition that, during the pre-treatment AIDS era, prevalent for gay men who in many instances felt they were facing the genocide of their tribe. Belcher understands the links. “Certainly, because I always felt under threat,” he says.

As much as I have been fortunate to not become a victim to it; as much as when I moved back to Toronto from New York the rumour was that I

moved here because I had AIDS and came here to die. I was skinny and people said I came here to take advantage of the health system. For me, my main reaction was, “don’t you feel more about Toronto than it’s only good to come home to die? (Belcher, interview)

Like so many gay-identified Toronto artists, AIDS was a major part of Belcher’s daily life. “It was either friends who were sick, friends that were passing away, friends that were struggling,” he says.

Throughout it all, as much as I didn’t have that struggle myself, there was always that fine edge that I could be tomorrow. It changed my life, my value system. It put me in a totally different headspace, a totally different place within the world. It shattered some of my basic thoughts about how I functioned in the world. (Belcher, interview)

In this way, depression became a primary experience and expression for Belcher. “There’s not a lot you can do about it — besides taking numbing drugs or getting your hands on a gun,” he says.

So, a person that is going through that is left in a horrible limbo. I imagine most people don’t reach out because there is not an effective way — to even reach out that you are suicidal because most people that are not depressed would never understand such an extreme way of feeling. Honestly, when it’s something that you have, it’s all day every day. It’s really the reason that I stopped making art for twelve years —because I didn’t want to be suicidal anymore. (Belcher, interview)

Risk and HIV/AIDS entangle in ways that many people who exist outside of AIDS cannot imagine. One important way is deeply paranoid — and shared by many people living with HIV, including myself: what happens if treatment is suddenly unavailable?

I asked McCaskell, “What does cure look like?” His desire for a cure would be far more motivated by the social implications rather than any impact it’s going to have on his life. “I became a vitamin freak during the [pre-treatment] epidemic, when there was nothing, and started taking massive doses of different things that people were saying my help,” he says. “I take less now, but I never quite got completely out of it. So I take all these vitamins, then I take

two pills [for HIV/AIDS] a day. I never even think about — so cure, for me, essentially I think I'm cured. One worries about what happens when the collapse of civilization occurs and what happens to my drugs." I immediately burst out laughing, in part for the somewhat secretive nature of McCaskell's admission, and in part due to my own similar worries. "If Mr. Trump produces a war," McCaskell says, "even if we're not immediately fried, if things break down — we're done for.

It's like we're on this little boat at the edge of Niagara Falls and tethered to the shore by a couple of pills. If that tether breaks, whoosh, we go over the edge. They say that you end up where you left off. My T-cells were under 50 when I went on anti-retroviral therapy in 1992. So if I went back down to 50, I wouldn't even have two years. (McCaskell, interview)

Theme IV Summary

In this section, several intersecting risky representations of HIV/AIDS emerge. McCaskell has a long history with experimental treatments and HAART. For him, a risky representation comes with looking cured (through treatment[s] and fitness regimes) while questioning what, exactly, does a cure look like. As men living and aging with HIV, both McCaskell and myself are concerned with the risky representation that "AIDS is over" because of HAART. This shared concern is rooted firmly in possible fascist futures and the collapse of social orders and pharmaceutical industries. We need our meds and the "AIDS is over" narrative is a risky and harmful imagining.

Karuhanga is HIV-negative and acknowledges some risky AIDS representations are queer, some are specifically gay-male narratives. She identifies representations of predominantly Black and Latinx communities that are disenfranchised. Other HIV-negative artist voices in my dissertation include Belcher and Hogan-Finlay. Belcher created a troubled and

risky narrative in *Kill Me* that made uncomfortable but very real links between AIDS, queer sexual identity, and mental health in the perceived face of tribal genocide. *Kill Me* and the voodoo dolls highlight the kinds of assumptions made about queer artists in the pre-treatment AIDS era, and the stigmatizing shame that queer artists living with HIV were subjected to in the pre-treatment era: that Toronto's health care system was its sole attraction for HIV-positive artists experiencing the final stages of the disease. Hogan-Finlay has used her voice in discourses of AIDS and AIDS-phobia through LGBTQI and trans-feminist channels.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter explored risk as multidimensional and intersectional. Using my participants' responses, I created a descriptive narrative that responds to the four themes that emerged in the interviews to produce a deeper understanding of risk in relationship to AIDS, art, and sex at the intersection of age, artistic practice, class, gender, and race. I discovered many previously untapped aspects to living with HIV (in my own experience), the ways that's industrial mitigations of risk that respond to AIDS do and do not matter, and the ways that the ongoing role of risk in artistic practice affects many artists who choose art over normative notions of a healthy individual economy. In this chapter, I showed the ways that risk creates conversation. Importantly, this chapter can be used as a companion guide to listening to my audio intervention and experiencing my video intervention.

Chapter Five: Risky Listening

In this chapter, I assign one track from my audio intervention to each of the four themes that organize my dissertation research: 1) risking the personal; 2) sexual ecologies; 3) art, artistic practice, and risk; and 4) HIV/AIDS, intersectionality, and its risky representations. These four tracks are selected from the twelve tracks that comprise my full audio intervention, *Soft Subversions* (2LP vinyl edition, 2021). In these audio works, I transformed the interviews into creative, "sonicotextual" (Weheliye 2005:89) responses through selected specific statements and commentary, and situated in different sound/musical settings. Then, I finessed each statement in Logic Pro X audio software using EQ, noise reduction (to try to eliminate some if not all of the noise floor that was present during each interview), and a gate (to cut out all extraneous sound between statements).

After sitting with these isolated and sonically-finessed statements, I set about listening to musics identified by the parameters of my AIDS Playlist and selected specific tracks that share sensibilities, messages, or atmosphere with the statements and ideas. Upon identifying the tracks that might work in relation to the statement(s), I started to seek out specific sonic citations that I could develop in sonicotextual ways. This process was a clear pronouncement of my own artistic practice and creativity. I chose specific statements for their relevance to risk as multidimensional and intersectional; for their insights to artistic practice, notions of safe space, industrial mitigations of risk, and the significant role of art and activism in response to HIV/AIDS and HIV (and sexual) criminalization.

I created the audio works by placing the statements into a basic musical setting (again using Logic). This placement included establishing time and key signature, and tempo, aspects

that are vital to conveying feeling and mood in music. Then, I tried different sonic citations in context with the chosen statements, time and key signatures, and tempo. In many cases, the sonic citations already carried fixed signatures and tempos that I had to process to meet my expectations and goals for each audio work. Once a basic sketch was established, I shared each demo with the artist featured in the track. Through ongoing dialogue (that varied in length and depth depending on the audio work and the participant featured) with each artist, a more refined sketch would emerge. Each track took about 72 hours to complete through processes of audio production strategies (including EQ, reverb, delay, modulation filters, distortion, tape delay [significant in relation to my goal to include dub tactics as a metaphor for voices at the margins], and mixer automation), and arrangement (the actual unfolding of the “song” in terms of intro, verse, chorus, bridge, outro. In some cases, I explored the non- and recombinant-teleological concepts that Fink interrogates (in *Repeating Ourselves*) as a form of desire creation. Why did I choose to work this way? The answer is, in part, an unconscious movement. The other part of the answer is to achieve a sonic response to my dissertation’s central problem, argument, and my research’s guiding question. How I come to something as material research is of less importance to me (and far less easier to discuss) than the final product. If the modern style of interpretation, as Sontag notes, is a form of excavation that destroys by digging behind the outgoing message to find a sub-text, then I must resist. The real and honest interpretation to my audio works must come in the form of affect and (physical) movement. The themes and the select tracks that respond to them are as follows (and I encourage you to listen, again, to the audio works that relate to each theme in order to bring the theoretical, methodological, and the

practice-led elements to life). The audio works are labelled, in the dissertation DropBox folder, using the four themes. Please listen to each audio work as you review the following notes:

Risking the Personal

This theme is encapsulated in my audio work "Intergenerational Crystal Ball," a three-part work that is described further in the following chapter. In the first part, Tim McCaskell talks about his recreational sex pursuits in gay bathhouses as a man living and aging with HIV, his work to educate younger MSM who are cruising in bathhouses *in situ* about sexual risks and methamphetamine use. McCaskell also discusses the parallels with early safer sex protocols (like condoms) and the stigmatizations those protocols produced for individuals who did not follow along with "the rules." From this particular point, I developed the title "Intergenerational Crystal Ball," as a possible lens to understand the debate over meth use between activist generations, the crystal ball as an icon of disco culture (an allusion to the classic disco "mirror ball"), a divinational tool of seers, and the different meanings of "crystal" (as a gem and as a street euphemism for "meth"). In the second part, Anthea Black discusses risk and concepts of safety and, in particular, safe space. The closing part is a treated field recording that I captured at a Toronto gay bathhouse.

The total duration of this audio work is eighteen minutes and twenty seconds.

Sexual Ecologies

I explore the theme of (ludic, radical, and risky) sexual ecologies in the two-part audio work "Any Clinic Any Club." In the first part, I use two voices/two narratives to create tension (or

complementary ambivalences) in relation to ludic, radical, or risky sexual ecologies, and speak to historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and art, and the ways PrEP and U=U insert into a range of risky practices (art and ludic and radical MSM sex) over four decades of AIDS. The two voices/narratives feature Robert Bolton and Shan Kelley.

Bolton crafted original lyrics for this (and one other) audio work in my intervention, lyrics that responded to my developing writings and about AIDS, risky sex, and the PrEP/U=U landscape. Bolton's multiple, evolving vocal takes (or iterations) were recorded directly to his iPhone as the lyrics took shape. I worked with each variation until he came to the takes that represented his "final statement." This method is not uncommon in the ongoing collaborative practice that Bolton and I have developed since 2009 (in other instances, Bolton has recorded vocals "on-the-fly" in my audio studio, using professional microphones and sound baffles. The use of an iPhone (or other portable digital recording device) is, however, an important component in what we understand as guerilla music-making that responds to urgent issues.

Kelley speaks to issues of risk in his artistic practice (especially as a father who wants to both protect his daughter from dangerous or judgment-laden confrontations with her peers at school) and in his sexual practices. Importantly, Kelley speaks about the role of PrEP as one element in a larger conversation about AIDS and risk, not the saving grace.

In the second part, I create a form of time travelling to draw the listener into particular historical narratives of MSM sex and HIV/AIDS in the pre-treatment era: a haunting of the present moment. Here, I use sonic source material from Marlon Riggs' 1989 documentary film *Tongues Untied*, specifically the repetition of "now we think as we fuck" and male guttural sounds (some also culled from Bolton's multiple vocal takes, specifically the interstitial sounds

between words and breathing) to convey sexual tensions to produce an overall sonicotextual response to the entanglement of thinking/fucking. Thinking through fucking is for me, as an artist, a critical response to a) PrEP, and b) the disco as a form of clinic.

The total time for this two-movement audio work is twelve minutes and twenty-two seconds.

Art, Artistic Practice, and Risk

In my audio work "Mystic Kill Me," I analyse the ways that risk can be put to work in art and artistic practice, artistic practice as a calling that leads some artists to commit to economic risks, especially for artists who experienced and survived the pre-treatment era. In the second half of this hybrid track, a deep dub-inspired section analyses the role of personal responsibility in the face of critique of so-called risky representations of intergenerational intimacy, desire, and sex.

This work's slow tempo indicates something close-up and intimate is about to happen. A slow dance? Come closer. The opening features the voice and statements of Alan Belcher, an established Toronto artist who survived the pretreatment AIDS era (Belcher is HIV-negative) but not without affective repercussions. Belcher understands the role of risk and the affect of pretreatment AIDS pressures in his practice. The making of voodoo dolls in his own image (discussed in Chapter Four) and releasing those dolls into the universe through galleries during the early 1990s is evidence of Belcher's practice-led risk-taking. Belcher's body is on record, specifically, in *Kill Me*.

In the second half, the tempo drops even further and Simon Muscat discusses his artistic practice, its evolution from jewellery-making and goldsmithing to marble sculpture. It is in his

sculptural practice that Muscat delivers his riskiest statements about sex in general and homosexuality specifically. As a gay man in his sixties, Muscat speaks about his troubled relationship to youth and how this relationship has evolved through his own efforts to take responsibility. In particular, Muscat addresses what he calls the “place of innocence,” and how that place has informed his choices, his creativity, and the ways he sees his future as an artist and MSM.

I recorded Belcher in his studio surrounded by artworks from many stages in his career, and new and emerging works-in-process on nearby table. Muscat was recorded at my dinner table over food and wine and cannabis. Intermittent sounds of mastication bump up the pleasure metre reading.

The total duration of this audio work is thirteen minutes and thirty seconds.

HIV/AIDS, Its Intersections and Risky Representations (Pre and Post PrEP/U=U)

In “AIDS Not Over (Persistent Dialectics of Risk Mix),” I address experiential and experimental facets of the pandemic, living with the virus in the current moment; the role of socio-sonic spaces (like the disco) as sites of resistance and celebration, and movements of anger and rage that have fuelled AIDS activism. This three-movement audio work begins with the sound of “pure desire” (a cat purring). This sound morphs into a sustained roar as the voice of Steve Ostrow (the creator and manager of the infamous Continental Baths, in 1970s New York City) introduces the musical program that is about to unfold. Ostrow’s opening statement is cited from the RCA Red Seal vinyl LP, Eleanor Steber Live at the Continental Baths, a rare release of the famed soprano

performing for a mixed audience of towel-clad MSM and New York socialites (in full evening drag) at the bathhouse.

As the sustained roar continues and grows, a new section emerges: a “song” with the voice of Robert Bolton reflecting on AIDS, radical and risky sexual practices, the lived experiences of HIV-positive people being “on record” (as data), and his own experience as a sound artist and sexual being who finds themselves set “on record” (in a studio, in a sexual situation). Around him, sonic source material of soulful voices carry the emotions and lift the listener with non-verbal sounds and repetition of the phrase, “it’s not over.” The track closes with a section that builds on Bolton’s refrain “put your body in it” and a sonic citation of “Put Your Body In It” by Stephanie Mills (a track that is critical in my AIDS Playlist imagination).

The overall tempo of “AIDS Not Over (Persistent Dialectics of Risk Mix)” is 80.52 bpm, significantly slower than most disco and house musics. This tempo intentionally reflects on the more soulful influences of Black music in disco and house cultures, and the interiorities that can emerge in “slowing down.” Bolton’s vocal takes for this audio work were recorded two ways: in my studio with professional gear and with his iPhone as he developed his lyrical reflections.

“AIDS Not Over (Persistent Dialectics of Risk Mix)” clocks in at fifteen minutes and thirty seconds.

Chapter Six: Becoming Sound Through Soft Subversions

Music, like drugs, is intuition, a path to knowledge. A path? No—a battlefield. — Jacques Attali (2014.20)

Faggotry scatters the love wherever it dances. —Faizal Deen (2008.153)

In this chapter, I discuss each of the selected audio works presented in Chapter 5. A description of and rationale for each piece informs the discussion through examination of what each chosen piece contributes to the dissertation's overall understanding of art/sex/risk. In *becoming sound through soft subversions*, I engage with time machines and other temporal portals that operate in practices and processes of music, sound, and listening. Throughout, I summarize concepts of music, sound, and listening (as a correlate to sound) that relate to the audio works to distill understandings of the ways each object contributes to my research, to map sonic arts as method, and to explore certain musical and sonic strategies—for example repetition and dub production—that are used to represent and express my original problematic.

This chapter and the works that are discussed respond to the theoretical materials that I presented in Chapter One, materials that convey different perspectives of AIDS, MSM sex, and queerness, and the ways these perspectives contrast with normative notions of citizenship, respectability, productivity, sex, and tropes of creativity and aesthetic self-creation. I created musical and sonictextual representations of particular theoretical ideas and concepts that are merged with statements from interviews and recontextualized with specific sonic source materials that, in turn, were manipulated and treated with audio production strategies. Through creative processes and materialities, I use the intellectual and philosophical platforms that respond to my dissertation's central problem as a map—or, specifically in relation to sound—a score for my creative analyses. "Score" itself can also be used in relation to sexual hook-ups.

Following Rubin, I treat sexuality in my creative analyses with “special respect” in this time of “great social stress” (Rubin 2011.138). This great social stress is in terms of AIDS *and* the new pandemic futures emerging through COVID-19 and its unknowns (which are not unlike HIV/AIDS in the pre-treatment era, and which were revealed during the latter stage of writing my dissertation). In this light, the artworks (audio, video), after the fact, demanded including additional trajectories that further expand on notions of ludic, radical, and risky MSM sex, safety and safe space, intergenerational queer desire, risk as an ongoing component of artistic practice, and the complex and contradictory experiences of people living with HIV in relation to disclosure, parenting, the pharmaceutical industrial complex, and AIDS governance (where my body is on record).

This chapter, as integral to my “method,” contributes to an overall understanding of the work that I present in this dissertation. There are many levels of creative work in play in this chapter: the ways that I arrived at the “song” titles (as “cut-ups” [that are derived from the “beat poets” who often used queer desire and temporality as a guiding force] or composites of ideas, AIDS Playlist sonic citations, and bits and pieces from the interviews; the use of affect through sound and music; the intentional disruption of *telos* to produce “desire creation” (Fink); the role of music as a form of magic; the links between music, drugs, ritual, shamanism, and gay spirituality; the evolution and role and meaning of “ambient” and ambient music in cultural production; the significant role of music in MSM socio-sonic spaces and cultures; queer temporality and spatiality; historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and art; the central idea of aesthetic self-creation; and my dissertation’s four themes. In this chapter, the disco is identified

as a site of resistance and celebration for and of difference and the transformative MSM sexual practices that are at the heart of this project.

My own creative practice and material research output that responds to art/sex/risk is integral to my dissertation's central problem and its interrogation. Material research includes audio, text- and language-based, and video. I put these media to work for very specific reasons: language creates society and reality, and where language ends, music begins; sound creates and conveys subtext to events and activities (as soundtracks do for film). I use video as a movement-based hybrid of sound and text to document and (immediately) disseminate through LGBTQI and AIDS community resources. Through methods and strategies of post-production, I aim for video that can fulfill and deliver my imaginaries in engaging and often meditative or ambient ways. Sound, in particular, holds a significant place in LGBTQI communities, histories, and cultures as a socio-sonic imprint, binding agent, and narrative form. I explore sound (and listening) through practice-led experimentation, and theoretical and methodological study. In the latter, I explore sound (and listening and recording) as "a research practice and composition as a representational practice" (Pink 2015.173).

Sound and music are transformed, in clubs and sexual spaces, into an affective, whole-body *vibrotactile* experience (Henriques 2010.78), where "flows, pressures, volumes, amplitudes, frequencies, intensities, and the dynamics of kinetics and rhythms" re/mix with sexual fantasies, identities, and lyrical messagings to "animate, excite, and 'build the vibes'" (Henriques 2011.219). As Henriques writes, "[w]ith both affect and sound waves, strength of feeling as well as amplitude of volume are measured intensity [that produce ways] in which vibrations can help understand the meaning of affect" (2010.78). While Henriques' example of vibrotactility is

located in Jamaican dancehall musics and spaces, I use vibrotactility as a shared, affective experience in sonic cultures where bass frequencies dominate the sound spectrum, including disco, house, techno and other forms of beat-driven music popular in LGBTQI communities. When Henriques notes, “[t]he commercial economy of the dancehall scene revolves almost entirely around the intensities of affect,” the dancehall scene’s sonic power translates easily to queer musics, times, and spaces (Henriques 2010.78). Socio-sonic spaces, like the disco are, as Syrus Marcus Ware writes, “essential to the revolution. We’ve met our lovers in these spaces. We’ve met activists in these spaces. We’ve become politicized in these spaces” (Ware 2020). This chapter includes the following eight sections: 1) AIDS Playlist; 2) Citing the Sonic: An Ethical Guide to Sonic Source Material; 3) The Sound Importance of High Theory; 4) Risking the Personal; 5) (Ludic or Radical or Risky) Sexual Ecologies; 6) Art, Artistic Practice, and Risk; 7) HIV/AIDS, Intersectionality, and Its Risky Representations; and 8) Visualizing, Writing, and Becoming Lucid Dreaming and Ludic Waking.

AIDS Playlist

The works in my audio intervention use the interviews, sonic citations from 1970s and 1980s disco and (early) house musics and cultures, original audio production tactics, original lyrical passages, and narratives of (ludic, radical, or risky) MSM sex, HIV/AIDS, PrEP, and U=U. These materials shaped the choices I made through unexpected connections, intentional “mash-ups” (audio collisions of diverse cultural, musical, temporally-situated sounds), and a sense of and desire for continuity in this dissertation. Importantly, my choices also reflect my personal and artistic relationship with art, music, queerness, and socio-sonic spaces that cater to or are

constructed around queer desire and MSM sex. Using musics that represent the history of the AIDS crisis, the radical MSM sexualities of the classic disco and house eras, audio production strategies that metaphorically activate, listen to, and privilege marginalized persons and communities, and current trends in sound and music, I emphasize temporality to notate and map HIV/AIDS, risk, art, and sex. This attention to temporality is intended to convey a so-called “authentic” playlist of or soundtrack to an AIDS crisis that intently listens with an ear toward the future. Authentic—as authoritative, genuine, original—musics of this era include recordings that were created with sexual freedom and liberation in mind, music that spoke from and to the different layers and vectors of disco musicians, dancers, and fans, and the communities they represented. To accomplish this, I cite sonic source material recorded primarily in the 1970s and early 1980s; music that was (and in some cases continues to be) familiar in gay clubs and other queer socio-sonic scenes. It is not insignificant to my research that classic disco and late 1980s and early 1990s house musics are currently experiencing renewed interest and turntable time. Original iterations of disco and house can be understood as sonic maps of the AIDS crisis; their so-called revival becomes a time machine. Specifically, my interest in the authentic sounds of the scene excludes music that was intentionally produced as AIDS awareness- and fund- raising (such as the *Red Hot* series) — my focus is on the actual, the unconscious, and the affective (as layers of unconscious knowing).

From this point of departure, I cite sounds from 1970s gay/disco and minimalist cultures to imply the virus’s ten-year incubation period (a figure cited in Laurie Lynd’s 2019 documentary, *Killing Patient Zero*). To signify early moments when the virus first made itself known in North American urban centres, I cite early 1980s disco music (the second half of the so-called classic

disco era). To represent the transition from classic disco to house music and culture, I cite house sounds that showcase tonal shifts from light to dark (often portrayed my major to minor key signatures), from glittery to bare bones (lavish orchestral disco arrangements to minimalist rhythm sections accompanied by a single synthesized sequences), that narrate the pre-HAART AIDS era and the ways that house music began to occupy more secretive locations and convey more interiorized sensibilities and affect. These sensibilities are reflected in both the sounds and timbres of the music, and the ways that dancing and movement changed direction. The lone dancer is not an unfamiliar sight in house culture. By the 1990s, dancers rarely danced with each other or in couples but turned, *en masse*, to face the DJ in a transparent gesture of dancing *with* music, not *to* music (and its social trappings); individual singularities relating to each other and the socio-sonic environment.

In these ways, my audio intervention—*Soft Subversions*—becomes a kind of time-travelling sound map of risk, art, sex and salvific sexual ecologies, HIV/AIDS intersectionality and its risky representations, desire, pleasure, and new identity creation — and asks “What are the historical sounds and silences of AIDS, and how do these sounds and silences resonate and work in the dynamic *continuum* and the PrEP/U=U landscape?”

The audio works discussed below often use song titles and lyrics in cut-up ways that were made infamous by the Dadaists in the 1920s, and popularized starting in the 1950s by artists and poets like William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin. Significantly, David Bowie (through Burroughs) also used the cut-up method of writing in many of his lyrics, and his creative output in general was and continues to play an inspirational role for me. Cut-up is an aleatory method of art making where elements of random choice are used in composition, production, and

performance to generate new meaning-making and otherwise possibilities. As example, one audio work on *Soft Subversions* is subtitled “Safe Space Dynamite.” This work references *Sweet Dynamite* (Claudja Barry, 1976), the album that “Love for the Sake of Love” is derived. Notably, the Barry song (and the album in general) is a stand out musically and lyrically through her use of language that aligns love and sex with dynamite and explosives/explosions. Meanwhile, Black’s narrative explodes and smashes notions of safe space. “Safe Space Dynamite,” thus, becomes a mash-up on multiple levels.



Andrew Zealley: *Soft Subversions* (2021), 2LP gatefold jacket (front panel); *Soft Subversions* (2021), 2LP gatefold jacket (back panel)

Citing the Sonic: An Ethical Guide to Sonic Source Material

Sonic citations, or “sampling,” in my creative interventions are an important part of what is called the mix: the merging of sonic, textual, and imagination-directed ideas, movements, utterances, visualizations, and writings that converse and interact in my dissertation. Weheliye reminds us what DJ Spooky (aka Paul D. Miller) wrote online (on a site that has long since vanished), “[t]he direct incorporation of previously existing sound source material into an aural

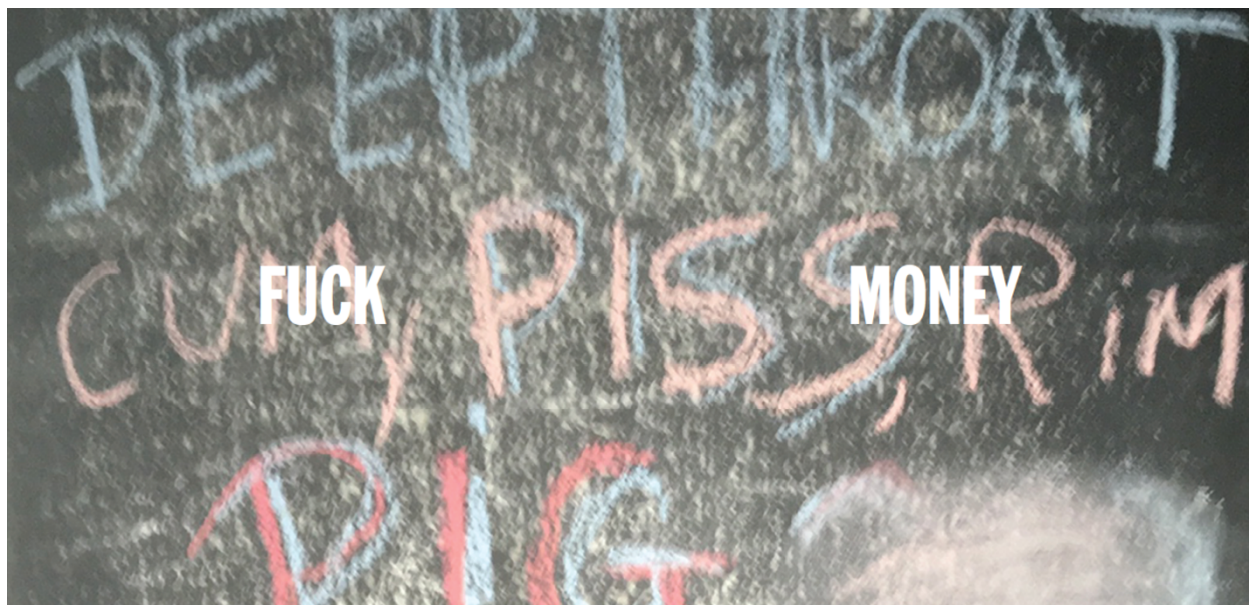
text [...] obeys a logic of bricolage that contains objects at different cultural velocities, and creates a multivalent temporal structure that is presented simultaneously. This is what we call the mix" (Weheliye 2005.88).

I use the mix in my dissertation to create new sonicotextual works (or sonicotextualities), where Weheliye's "logic of bricolage" imagines and listens in on AIDS and radical MSM sex through (sound) art processes and materialities. This bricolage of existing sound source material is not without risks and I take these risks as a voluntary and continuing form of aesthetic self-creation: my body, my (vinyl) record, my body on (vinyl) record. Today, many songs already feature a "multitude of samples from earlier recordings in their structure, contributing to the palimpsestic layers of the mix" (Weheliye 2005.90). The tension between the manufacturing of audio studio gear that enables artists to sample and cite existing sound source material, and the legions of music industry lawyers is fiery and vigorous. But tension is also a tool in the hands and ears of artists; and, curiously, the manufacturers of the enabling gear are absent from legal consequence.

This particular thread of legal and ethical debates around sampling first emerged in 1991 when California-based industrial music group, Negativland, released their now notorious single "U2," a release that featured the famous Dublin group's name on the jacket and roused the wrath of Island Records and Warner/Chappell Music publishers. In their publication, *The Letter U and the Numeral 2*, Negativland compiled legal and media materials about the incident, including a Village Voice review: "Don't fuck with the corporate control of culture. Don't fuck with the media" (Negativland 1992.5). In the current era of neoliberal capitalism and corporatized culture, digital sampling has swelled beyond expectations. "Sampling as practice

and the rise of the sampler as hardware," writes Timothy Taylor, "have tended to be examined as practices of individuals, or as effects of 'postmodern' culture" (Taylor 2016.445). Taylor, however, understands sampling as part of "a broad shift in heightened consumption" in Euro-Western culture, a shift that is part of the rise of neoliberal capitalism toward "an ever-increasing commodification and marketization of virtually everything, which is accompanied by ideologies that construct everything as either a commodity or commodifiable" (Taylor 2016.446). If sampling in the neoliberal era imagines a consumer's relationship to music (as industrial mitigations of risk imagine compliant homonormative MSM relationships), both in making and listening, then sonic citations in new music productions are a reflection of not only evolving compositional practices and approaches but integral to practically all popular musics and home studio-based music productions. As Taylor writes, "[t]echnologies developed for one reason may end up being used in ways unforeseen by its makers, as society, culture and history shape and continually reshape our relations to each other and the tools we use in those relations, and to make music" (Taylor 2016.450).

In the inside gatefold jacket of the 2Lp vinyl edition of *Soft Subversions* (pictured above), I comment on capital and commodity with the bold statement: **Fuck Money**. This statement's movement is intended for a number of directions and possibilities, including outright refusal to obey monetary power (queer economy), a reminder of my mother's insistence on "mad money" when I first started dating (and a newer translation that applies to funds to go fucking), and money dedicated to sex.



Andrew Zealley: *Soft Subversions* (2021), 2LP gatefold jacket (inside panels)

I use sonic citations in my work for many reasons: the intended and/or reimagined meanings of language in a particular vocal or instrumental phrase and the performance of that phrase; the sound of the room or space where the citation was originally recorded and the kind of microphone(s) used; the affective layers in a citation through performance, its original context, and its recontextualization; the otherwise possibilities that emerge when existing sound source materials are inserted into original instrumental arrangements or the kinds of arrangements that are inspired by these materials; and to conjure the times, places, and socio-sonic spaces that are central to my research of art, sex, and risk in relation to AIDS (and the AIDS playlist) and make these conjurings take on new life and meaning in the era of AIDS industry. My approach is intended as less consumption, more recycling and repurposing.

The Sound Importance of High Theory

Sound, music, listening, dancing, language, poetry, sex, *telos*, and risk — what do these objects have in common? Imagine the following: dancing shares a sexual, responsive relationship to music; listening is a correlate of sound; listening can be deeply erotic (especially when listening

to the sound of sex); sound (and listening) is critical to language and the ways we perceive and understand; music—disco, house, and minimalist musics in particular—can disrupt *telos* and, in turn, produce states of desire; poetry can be like dancing with language. The ineffability of music itself is problematic. As Vladimir Jankélévitch writes,

Music acts upon human beings, on their nervous systems and their vital processes [...] This power—which poems and colors possess occasionally and indirectly—is in the case of music particularly immediate, drastic, and indiscreet [and] The man inhabited and possessed by this intruder, the man robbed of a self, is no longer himself: he has become nothing more than a vibrating string, a sounding pipe. [...] This process, at once irrational and shameful, takes place on the margins of truth, and thus borders more on magic than empirical science. (Jankélévitch 2003.1)

I check for a pulse: Am I writing about music, poetry, or a night at the disco and the crossfade to the bathhouse? How is “high theory” imagined and entangled with this project, the interviews, and the connections between music, drugs, and ritual? Music, Jankélévitch insists, “does not allow the discursive, reciprocal communication of meaning but rather an immediate and ineffable communication. [...] For music does not always convey the serenity of wise men: it fevers those who listen to it, drives them mad. Music is derationalizing and unhealthy” (2003.9). At the same time, Jankélévitch reminds (and cautions) us of the history music’s curative or salvific benefits, noting how Plato thought that the musician “plays with dangerous forms of enchantment; and that the state should regulate the use of musical influences and contain them within a framework of sound medicine” (2003.3). Felix Guattari, too, positions music—and poetry—in therapeutic terms, describing how he considers poetry as one of the most important components of human existence, “yet less in terms of value than as a functional element. Poetry should be prescribed like vitamins. [...] The same thing with music: it’s fundamental” (Guattari 2009.67). Guattari’s insistence on the functionality of poetry, music, and art in general moves

toward strategic thinking instead of practical, day-to-day situations and applications. "How," he questions, "can people have a creative rapport with the situation in question, like a musician with his music or a painter with painting? A cure is like constructing a work of art, except that you have to reinvent each time the art anew" (ibid). Notions of cure and the curative and salvific are important in my dissertation's themes, methods, and material productions: as with the (neo)shaman, the cure is in becoming the curer.

Attali's epigraph understands the ways that music and drug use links the ludic, the curative, the salvific, and ritual with radical sexual ecologies. His writings on noise and music, and the intersection of these objects in relationship to drugs, shamanism, and ritual present a crucial crossroads in my dissertation and, in particular, my project's audio works which seek to reveal and iterate the layers of power, magic, ceremony, and processes of self-creation and -determination that can be located in disco and house musics and cultures. As Attali writes,

When power want to make people *forget*, music is ritual *sacrifice*, the scapegoat; when it wants them to *believe*, music is enactment, *representation*; when it wants to *silence* them, it is reproduced, normalized, *repetition*. Thus it heralds the subversion of both the existing code and the power in the making, well before the latter is in place.

Today, in embryonic form, beyond repetition, lies freedom: more than a new music, a fourth kind of musical practice. It heralds the arrival of new social relations. Music is becoming *composition* [...] music is a means of understanding, like the unbalanced relation to ecstasy created by drugs. (2014. 20)

Drawing on mystically-infused ethnographic research, Attali notes that ingestion of the peyote plant holds knowledge that is "reminiscent of the prophetic knowledge of the shaman, of the ritual function of the pharmakon. And of the interference between stages in the deployment of systems of music" (Attali 2014.20).

Pulling apart the layers of meaning in “ecstasy,” the sensation and the drug, we reveal a form of *jouissance* that connects to divinity and queer temporalities; queer temporalities as nonchronological and fragmented discourse, lived experience, and (momentary) disappearance. Writing on montage and fragmented discourse, Anzaldúa notes: “Let the reader beware — I here and now issue a *caveat perusor*: s/he must do the work of piecing this text together” (2007.127). She also connects spirituality, sexuality, and the body, and puts this connection to work in expansive ways.

I feel I’m connected to greater than myself like during orgasm: I disappear and am just this great pleasurable wave, like I’m uniting with myself in a way I have not been. In this union with the other person I lose my boundaries, my sense of self [and] there’s a connection between my body and this other’s body, to her soul or spirit. At the moment of connection, there is no differentiation. And I feel that with spirituality. [...] When I’m there being sexual, sensual, erotic, it’s like all the Glorias are there; none are absent. They’ve all been gathered to this one point. In spirituality I feel the same way. When I’m meditating or doing any kind of spiritual thing, there’s a connection with the source. (Anzaldúa 2007.85)

“Going back through religion and philosophy,” writes José Esteban Muñoz, “we might think of a stepping out of time and place, leaving the here and now of straight time for a then and a there that might be queer futurity [that] represents a leaving of self for something larger in the form of divinity. [...] Ecstasy and *jouissance* thus both represent an individualistic move outside of the self” (2009.185-186). Muñoz suggests these usages resonate with the life of the term ecstasy in the history of philosophy: *Ekstasis*, in the ancient Greek, as “to stand” or “to be outside of oneself,” and the more general meaning as a mode of contemplation or consciousness that is not self-enclosed, particularly in regard to being conscious of the other (2009.186). Moreover, concepts of temporal unity—which Muñoz organizes as the past (having been), the future (the not-yet), and the present (the making-present)—lead to temporally calibrated ideas of ecstasy

that contain the potential to help us encounter a queer temporality, “a thing that is not the linearity that many of us have been calling straight time” (ibid).

Today is the last day that I'm using words / They've gone out, lost their meaning / Don't function anymore / Let's / Let's / Let's get unconscious, honey / Let's get unconscious, honey / Traveling / Leaving logic, and reason / Travelling / To the arms of unconsciousness (“Bedtime Story” by Björk and Nellee Hooper, 1994)²⁹

How many times have I time-travelled through music’s boundless trajectories, with and without the enhancement of drugs? In these travels, I am unbound from time itself. As in the darkened hallways and backrooms of the queer bathhouse, time loses relevance — except for the eight-hour limit imposed on check-in and check-out, a limitation that is easily collapsed through renewal of a room or locker rental. Make it sixteen hours. Make it endless. Muñoz notes how taking ecstasy with another person becomes “a request to stand out of time together, to resist the stultifying temporality and time that is not ours, that is saturated with violence both visceral and emotional, a time that is not queerness [and heralds] a queer time that is not yet here but nonetheless always potentially dawning ” (2009.187).

As with Chapter Five, it is recommended that you listen to each audio work in relationship to the theme it represents as you read. Optimum: listen to the related audio work directly *after* each thematic section (below).

²⁹ “Bedtime Story” is the title track on Madonna’s sixth studio album, released in February 1995. Drawing on the dream-like ambiances that Icelandic singer-songwriter, Björk, was casting in her own audio releases at the time, Madonna hoped to conjure her own brand of ambient-influenced pulsating and recombinant teleological deep house beat. The track accomplished both that goal and the broadened the singer’s audience to include aficionados of non and recombinant teleological musics that fuel the machinery at the heart of disco’s temporal powers.

Risking the Personal

This theme in my dissertation is analysed and sonically represented in the three-part audio work “Intergenerational Crystal Ball.” The subtitles of these three movements are: “Intergenerational Crystal Ball,” “Safe Space Dynamite,” and “Sensory Ethnography.”

In the first part, McCaskell risks the personal through sharing stories about recreational sex, gay bathhouses, sexuality and aging with HIV, sexual health discourse in the heat of the moment, widespread methamphetamine (or “meth”) use in Toronto’s MSM sexual communities, and the incorporation *and* abandonment of so-called safer sex practices in the current era when the PrEP/U=U landscape are challenging and rewriting historical narratives of MSM sex, safer sex protocols, and AIDS. In the middle part, Black talks about risk and concepts of safe space. I work an isolated iteration of Black saying the word “risk” in the rhythm section of this section, producing a repetitive beat where “risk” is integral. In the third part, I use a field recording of the interior corridors and dark rooms at Steamworks, an American bathhouse chain that has a location in Toronto. I treat this field recording with effects that are typical in dub and/or remix approaches—such as EQ (specifically lo cut), reverb (to alter the size of the space), and tape delay (an effect that plays with repetition, time/tempo, and the stereo field [left/right])—where space and time are fucked up and with.

In “Intergenerational Crystal Ball” I use sonic source material from *Solo Drumming* (Fritz Hauser, 1985). In *Solo Drumming*, recorded over four nights in the glass-roofed of the Martin-Gropius-Bau (Berlin), Swiss percussionist Hauser plays with the building’s seven-second long reverberation. I, in turn, play with Hauser’s attention to temporality and the masterful deployment of recombinant teleologies in his performances to express incubation, virality,

contagion, suppression, becoming undetectable, and the ludic (where time is sometimes displaced altogether) through a temporal lens. The Hauser citations deliciously conjure Fink's *repetition as desire creation* and the power of recombinant teleology in sound as a way to always be in the middle (instead of the beginning or the end). This middle ground represents the meth-use that focuses McCaskell's statements about bathhouse sex in the current moment, and the ways that meth and other drugs and ludic situations collapse normative time. Through processes of challenging song structure in historical and popular contexts, which commonly follow legible teleological trajectories, "Intergenerational Crystal Ball" (and the other audio works analyzed here) creatively chart queer time, space, place, and desire through the lens of risking the personal, (ludic or radical or risky) sexual ecologies, and HIV/AIDS. Through these sonic and temporal disruptions or extensions, I recognize (as outlined in Chapter One) disco and house musics and cultures as expressions and markers of difference, resistance, and possibility in historical/evolving narratives of risk MSM sex and art.

In this audio work, I also cite sonic source material from "Double Cross" (First Choice, Salsoul Records, 1979), "Let No Man Put Asunder" (First Choice, Salsoul Records, 1983), "Dreamin'" (Loleatta Holloway, Salsoul Records, 2000), "Love Sensation" (Loleatta Holloway, Salsoul Records, 1980), and "Pussyfooter" (Jackie Robinson, RCA Records, 1977). Each classic disco era sonic citation works with and through Fink's recombinant- and/or non-teleological uses of repetition. Each citation carries sexual and risky affects that were crucial to disco dance floor movement. The title of this audio work is a cut-up take on McCaskell's sexual storytelling, disco culture's iconic mirror ball, the crystal ball of fortune telling practices, and one street name for methamphetamine: crystal.

In the opening section of this audio work, Tim McCaskell speaks about his recreational sexual pursuits in gay bathhouses. “I’m a bath boy,” he candidly states at near the beginning of the work. As McCaskell’s storytelling unfolds, he speaks about his experiences with MSM who use methamphetamine in combination with sex. Meth use is front-of-mind for McCaskell as a primary risk in the current moment of MSM sex. His perspective has already encountered serious blow-back from a younger circle of queer AIDS and sex activists who claim that McCaskell’s approach (to start public discussions about meth use in MSM sexual practices) creates more stigma for users. Methamphetamine (also known as meth, tina) use in Toronto’s MSM community has, for the past few years, been on the rise. In my interview with the activist and author, McCaskell responded to my question—What does risk sound or look like—without pause: the unchecked meth use in MSM circles.

McCaskell deems the meth use situation to be a crisis of epidemic proportion in light of the inaction and silence on the part of Toronto’s AIDS direct services and educational outreach — and he is not alone. On 25 January 2019, *NOW Magazine* published McCaskell’s searing editorial, “Crystal meth: the new silent epidemic in Toronto’s queer community” (McCaskell 2019). The article’s main cutline encapsulates McCaskell’s concerns: “I lived through the worst years of the AIDS epidemic when nobody wanted to talk about it – once again everybody’s pretending nothing is going on with the explosion of queer people experimenting with crystal meth during sex” (ibid). Four weeks after the publication of McCaskell’s text, a rebuttal co-written by five younger activists challenged his argument, insisting that his approach produces unwanted, unneeded shame and stigma for queer people experimenting with meth during sex. The space of interpretation that opens between sides produces a productive opportunity for

thinking about intergenerational differences in the ways that drug use is observed and experienced. But this intergeneration frame is too simple. One of McCaskell's main concerns is over meth users who do not have the resources (through class, economy, race, age, ableism) to mindfully manage the addiction.

"Intergenerational Crystal Ball" seeks to optimize McCaskell's perspective. In doing so, it immerses into the ways that risking the personal (and McCaskell's open and thoughtful admissions as "a bath boy" (interview) whose recreational sex activities include sincere, revealing intimacies with younger men (that reflect Delany's notions of meaningful social contact that cuts across boundaries of race, age, and class in anonymous sexual experiences), HIV status disclosure, and impromptu counselling on issues of safer sex, condoms, HIV/AIDS, and undetectability.

In the middle section of this audio work, Black speaks about and "explodes" notions of safe space. This conversation spins out of McCaskell's narrative about MSM bathhouse sex and general notions of the bathhouse as a safe space for MSM, though this notion is challenged by lived experience(s). "I think there is no safe space," Black proclaims. She thinks that we have "to be careful about under whose definition of safety are we really operating. And that maybe the illusion of safety that is created for some is really a powerful denial of safety for others, or a powerful denial of other things that allow us to get to the juicy stuff," she says. This section is, in ways, a continuation of the track's overarching theme of safety, sex, drug use, and the kinds of judgment that emerge through pursuits pleasure and discourses of harm reduction. In the first two movements, the speakers address concepts of risking the personal: McCaskell through his disclosure of his HIV status, continued sexual activity, and his efforts to teach younger MSM

about HIV/AIDS and meth as an addictive agent; Black through her parsing of space in relation to her experiences as a teacher, and through her intimate relationship with an HIV-positive individual (Black is HIV-negative). McCaskell's interview was recorded in his house; Black's interview took place at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), Toronto, during a set-up for an event (that created significant noise floor on the interview recording).

The third, closing movement originated as a field recording "walkabout" of Steamworks, a gay bathhouse in Toronto. This part concludes my sonic analysis of risking the personal by drawing the listener into my own personal real of risky experience. This field recording documents my movements through the venue, starting with exiting my private cabin (the sound of the door closing behind me), movement through the club (evidenced by volume and dynamic shifts in the live DJ soundtrack as my position in relation to the DJ booth and its central sound system changed), and a visceral/vocal section when I pause to observe a group of men gathered around a couple engaging with a leather and chain fuck sling located directly behind the DJ booth. The DJ soundtrack shifts again as I continued my way through the club's hallways and returned to my cabin.³⁰

Sexual Ecologies

In Chapter One, MSM politics is located in clinics and clubs, and revealed and reflected in crystal balls that peer through and across generations, shimmering beams of light cast by disco mirror balls, and in bathhouses and parks. In my dissertation, PrEP/U=U landscape is understood as a

³⁰ The third part of this audio work, subtitled *Sensory Ethnography*, is a valuable sonic record of a gay bathhouse in Toronto. In the present pandemic moment that is COVID-19, the future of such spaces is unknown until sexual interaction guidelines can be developed and put in place. What will bathhouses of the future sound like?

mainstream marker in historical/evolving narratives of risk that entangle with MSM sex and art, and HIV/AIDS over four decades. The theme of sexual ecologies makes a connection with my interviews, as a source and, in some instances, as a sensual interaction between artists where the subject of ludic, radical, or risky sex informs the interaction. Ludic, radical, or risky, sexual ecologies represent a cusp to worlds where desire, pleasure, and forms of affective communication can fruitfully impact on and produce more meaningful social contact between MSM, specifically, and humans in general. Through these salvific sexual ecologies, I seek to restore practices of radical sexual experimentation that produce new understandings and expressions of beauty, expanded corporeality, and countersexual narratives that permit us to get lost in sexual translations. In these trans lingual (sound, vibration, movement, language) spaces, individuals can move, in the sexual sense, across borders of identity and operate between languages and gestures. Analyzing AIDS, PrEP, and sexual ecologies as points of transition, my two-movement (without pause) audio piece "Any Clinic Any Club" interrogates historical and evolving narratives of MSM sex and AIDS. The two movements are subtitled "Any Clinic Any Club" and "PrEP Tongues Untied."

In the first half of this audio work, vocalist and collaborator Robert Bolton riffs of ideas of risk, sex, barebacking, and responsibility that Bolton developed through reading and sharing ideas from my dissertation research. In a counter narrative, artist Shan Kelley speaks about risk, sex, and PrEP as one piece of a puzzle that can produce new, salvific sexual ecologies where trust, U=U, and finding sexual pleasure are central. The resulting tension (or complementary ambivalences) between these narratives is supported and underscored by particular sonic source material including background vocals and rhythm section citations from "Is There More

To Life Than Dancing" (Noel, Virgin Records, 1979) and instrumentation from "Another Man" (Barbara Mason, West End Records, 1983). The tension emerges between Bolton's defiance—"fuck me dead/I don't care"—and Kelley's softer, inquisitive and inquiring tones, "Who's spreading AIDS?"

These sonic citations work in counterpoint with original composition, instrumentation, and audio production. The Noel citations are important for their commentary on disco culture. The Los Angeles-based singer is backed and originally produced, for this album, by Ron and Russell Mael, the brothers behind long-standing music group Sparks. Sparks are renowned for astute critiques of North American culture and, especially, the social practices of Los Angeles (their home base). "Is There More to Life Than Dancing" is featured on *Dancing Is Dangerous* (Virgin Records, 1979) and I put this music and its subliminal messagings on risk in relation to the disco. The Mason track, "Another Man," is a notorious slice of early 1980s house that has, since its release, produced controversy for the song's lyrical narratives on the down low (African American MSM practices of secrecy), homophobia, and critiques of nature in relation to homosexuality. The tension produced by the song's harmful narratives and irresistible groove is critical to "Any Clinic Any Club."

Bolton's lyrics convey a range of risky MSM sexual practices over four decades of AIDS. Produced in collaborative response to my dissertation-related personal sex narratives as (ludic or radical or risky) sexual ecologies; concepts of homonormativity, bug pitchers and catchers (or chasers); the curative and salvific natures of (and blurred borders between) disco and clinic; and biopolitical and neoliberal managements of and investment in HIV/AIDS, Bolton's lyrics are as follows:

Any Clinic Any Club

Make me sick. Sell me care.
 You say Queer. Fucking square.
 Make me cum. Fuck me bare.
 Make my bed. I don't care.

You make me sick. Sell my cure.
 Did you say Queer? You fucking square.
 Make me cum. Fuck me bare.
 Fuck me dead. I don't care.

You make me sick.

Any clinic. Any Club.
 Any clinic. Any Club.
 Any clinic. Any Club.
 Any clinic. Any Club.

Any clinic. Any Club.
 Find my love. Fuck your fear.
 Catch my bug. Fuck me bare.
 Time has come. Say your prayers.

You make me sick.

The second movement of "Any Clinic Any Club" focuses on sound citations drawn from Riggs's 1989 documentary, *Tongues Untied*. Historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and AIDS activism form vital locations of otherwise possibilities and socio-politically organized perspectives that are critical to understanding and humanly (and creatively) managing and balancing sexual health practices and life with HIV. The second movement also includes sonic citations of "My Baby's Got ESP" (Four Below Zero, P&P Records, 1976), "Ten Percent" (Double Exposure, Salsoul Records, 1976), and "Cheaters Never Win" (Love Committee, Gold Mind Records, 1976). Constellations of risk in MSM sexual practices and AIDS is revealed in this audio

work in true time machine fashion, entwining old and new sounds with a message that perseveres across decades.

Art, Artistic Practice, and Risk

Risk-taking often occupies the heart of artistic practice and its representations and materializations. To represent this theme of my dissertation, my audio work “Mystic Kill Me” comprises two movements (without pause) that form an extended dance floor dub mix. Each movement features the voice of an artist who speaks to issues of risk: sexual, economic, spiritual, and so-called deviant risk. The subtitles for this audio work’s two movement are “Mystic Kill Me” and “Place of Innocence.”

“Mystic Kill Me” opens upon artist Alan Belcher speaking to issues of risk from the perspective of an artist who has dedicated his life to his practice in the face of economic ruin, and the ways that surviving the pre-treatment AIDS era impacted his creativity and experience. Segments of Belcher’s message epitomize the role of risk as an ongoing artistic undertaking. In this first section, sound citations from “Disco Mystic” (Lou Reed, Arista Records, 1979) weave around and through cymbal sounds from Hauser’s *Solo Drumming* (above) in counterpoint with original composition, instrumentation, and audio production that transitions—in radical Jamaican dub style—to a section where I use spatial production strategies to transform the sound and style. The Reed citation is of particular importance: included on *The Bells* (Arista Records, 1979), “Disco Mystic” met with mixed reviews from many fans and critics who dismissed it. The recording was a risky move. Through Reed’s deadpan vocal delivery of the repetitive title (which is the extent of the song’s lyrics) and the particular timing of the release

(the close of the seventies), this song can be understood as disco, as mystic (and the entanglement of MSM sex and spirituality qua Savastano), and importantly as *prophet* of what disco would become in just two years: HIV would begin its sweep through Toronto (and other North American urban centres), clearing artists, sisters, brothers, fathers, mothers, lovers, users, and artists from the city. Belcher's monologue intersects with Sontag and her position *against* interpretation when he reveals that most people mistakenly read *Kill Me* as an easy way out of AIDS.

In the second section, I cite sounds from "Time So Hard" (Tristan Palma, Midnight Rock, 1982) and "Love Sensation" (Loleatta Holloway, Gold Mind Records, 1980) to create an intentional titular tension. Artist Simon Muscat talks about risk in relation to his studio practice, material production, and his desire for—and caution in terms of—intergenerational sexual experiences as an aging MSM in his sixties and the ways that personal responsibility and ethics come into play. Muscat's wandering tone and risky personal storytelling undulates with the pulsing instrumentation and dub production style, like someone surfacing between forceful waves to say something important before disappearing behind another surge. I use this treatment in reference to "The Gift," the curious narrative track on The Velvet Underground's (VU) sophomore long player (*White Light, White Heat*, Verve Records, 1968). "The Gift" features John Cale telling a dark tale of love and obsession against a noisy wall of crushing VU jam. The tale's compelling unfolding, and grim, sardonic conclusion are made all the more so by the band's incessant grind. I seek to let glimpses of Muscat's risking the personal flash between waves of delay and washes of feedback — aiming to let those glimpses confuse and make more curious each listening. Concepts of repetition in practices of listening are vital to understanding

the studio as a compositional tool. As Brian Eno writes, “[t]he first thing about recording is that it makes repeatable what was otherwise transient and ephemeral” (2015b.127).

The effect of recording is that it takes music out of the time dimension and puts it in the space dimension. As soon as you do that, you’re in a position of being able to listen again and again to a performance [or recording], to become familiar with the details you most certainly had missed the first time through, and to become very fond of details that weren’t intended by the composer or the musicians. The effect of this on the composer is that [s]he can think in terms of supplying material that would actually be too subtle for a first listening. (Eno 2015b.127)

In practices of deep listening where the listener dedicates their aural focus on specific instruments or production tactics, Eno’s spatialization of sound in practices of listening can be applied to the second movement of “Intergenerational Crystal Ball”: to take in every moment of Muscat’s narrative, as it undulates in the track’s sonic waves requires multiple listenings; the listener must immerse themselves with Muscat to understand and—hopefully—relate to his risking the personal.

Repetition, dub strategies, and concepts of somatic vibrotactility are critical to this audio work and the narratives of risk it comprises because of the insistence on (murderous versus tender) touch in Belcher and Muscat’s narratives: Belcher’s voodoo dolls and *Kill Me* projects each emphasize touch in disembodied ways while the subjects in Muscat’s sculptural works literally touch in seemingly risky modes that, with deeper consideration, transform into touching growth and self-creation. In this audio work, I activate dub-like situations that, in turn, produce sonic bodies, proprioceptive (stimuli that are produced and perceived within an organism,

especially connected with movement of the body) and haptic responses (with respect to sense of touch), and somatic vibrotactility.³¹

Importantly, sound organizes significant locations in LGBTQI art, communities, histories, and cultures, as a socio-sonic method of creation, binding agent, narrative form, and an affective, whole-body *vibrotactile* experience (Henriques 2010.78). On the surface, the disco can appear as a space with people just dancing — but in context with LGBTQI identity politics and struggles, HIV/AIDS and activisms, homophobia and resistance to, the disco represents both site and movement that are organized around music to establish a vital social refuge for lesbians, MSM, queers, and transgender people. Here, people are not just dancing; they are rejoicing, resisting, mourning, purging and releasing, preparing for war, transcending, building, storytelling, and—importantly—vibrating with the sounds of the space. In interview with Juliette Premmeur, Sylvère Lotringer describes New York City’s Mudd Club, at the height of the pretreatment AIDS crisis, saying, “[i]t was so loud that no one could even talk with each other. Just dancing among this crowd was meaningful enough. We all knew each other and there was a sense of togetherness” (Lawrence 2016.475).

Though traces of irony subvert the word “disco,” none are intended in my research. *Risky Beeswax* celebrates the sexy, celebratory, and political implications and promise of disco music, culture, and space. Studio dub strategies and affect(s), first developed in Jamaican reggae musics, later put to work in electronic and dance musics as “remix,” are important to many sonic experiments used in disco (and, in particular, house musics). “Mystic Kill Me” interrogates ways

³¹ Micah E. Salkind puts vibrotactility to work to “analyze the affective economies of bass-heavy frequencies like those underpinning The Warehouse sound” common in Chicago house musics (2019.60). This can also be applied to deep house music styles in general and Jamaican dub strategies where the low-end (that is, bass and sub-rhythm sections) produces powerful vibrations that are, literally, physical in affect.

that sound and listening can be put to work with productively risky results, literally (through contrasting musical genres) and figuratively (through radical frequency-play and listening strategies). Moreover, this audio work aims to suggest curative—or salvific—aspects of risking the personal and sexual ecologies (in the spoken narratives), and risk in art and artistic practice. Muscat finds growth and wellbeing through his often radical and risky sculptural practice where he works through issues of personal responsibility as an aging, sexual MSM. Belcher confronts his risky economic futures through an art practice that is not only risky in its capacity to create regular changes in content and material, he takes full ownership through the risky tensions that arise as markets shift and art worlds transform.

Risk is understood, in my research, as a method of self-creation that attempts to silence normativity in order to favour noisier singularities: the salvific. In his survey of observational methods in the (birth and) history of the clinic, Foucault emphasizes “seeing and knowing” (2003.131) as foundational to a clinician’s method, that is, it defines a correlation between the gaze and language.

The observing gaze refrains from intervening: it is silent and gestureless [...] the purity of the gaze is bound up with a certain silence that enables [the clinician] to listen. [...] The gaze will be fulfilled in its own truth and will have access to the truth of things if it rests on them in silence, if everything keeps silent around what it sees. The clinical gaze has the paradoxical ability to hear a language as soon as it perceives a spectacle. (Foucault 2010.131-132)

From this place, I add listening to the methodology’s actions—thus: seeing, listening, and knowing—in order to find (and sense) deeper understanding of and meaning in the entanglement of music, sound, dancing, language, poetry, and sex; and risk and harm reduction. Dub strategies are critical to listening (and knowing) this entanglement.

Reggae music production techniques of both versioning and dubbing provide striking examples of both the creative intensifying powers of repeating, reiterating and recursive practices. [...] *[R]epeating* is a verb, a doing in the world, a becoming. Musically in dubbing this is often a reverberating echo gradually diminishing into silence. Either coming or going, *repeating is becoming different*. [...] Dubbing makes a point of drawing attention to the characteristics of the material substance of its electronic medium [consistent with the concept of] sound recording as representation, rather than reproduction. (Henriques 2011.165-166)

Dub versions provoke an aesthetic confrontation between electronic recording, or representing, and the material vibrations of sounding itself (Henriques 2011.166). In this way, we can imagine sound, music, dancing, sex, and language—too—as representation, not reproduction, as technologies of sensation; and the reception of language as an affective and biorhythmic vibration of sounding. As Salkind writes, “bodies under pressure from powerful bass frequencies respond to sonic pressure in ways that are also shaped by internal biorhythmic pulsations,” hence the propensity for many disco and house tracks to cycle at 120 beats per minute (bpm), mirroring the “normal” frequency of a healthy adult human heartbeat during the peak intensity of sexual intercourse (Salkind 2019.61). In this way, the convergence or divergence between a dancer’s internal pulses, the animating socio-sonic vibes of a house music club, and external vibrotactile pressure might incite pleasure, pain, or catharsis (ibid).

When music (and certain audio composition and production strategies in particular) focuses on repetition, the *telos* that we associate with popular music storytelling (also evident in classical structures by the likes of Beethoven and Mozart) is disrupted. As Fink writes, “we might unbend enough to recognize in minimalism and disco a ‘de-natured’ teleology [...] a great epistemological point gained: we would at least acknowledge the possibility of constructions of desire in repetitive music, however tantalizingly tantric or disturbingly insatiable” (2005.47).

Recombinant or nonteleological approaches in music composition and audio production opens passages to discovering postmodern recombinations of desire itself wherein “music sounds so different because *desire* is so different now” (ibid, his emphasis).

In “Mystic Kill Me,” I activate dub-like situations that, in turn, inspire and produce sonic bodies, proprioceptive (stimuli that are produced and perceived within an organism, especially connected with movement of the body) and haptic responses (with respect to sense of touch), and somatic vibrotactility.³² These dub situations seek to reflect on and represent the work’s risky narratives by letting them float between layers of feedback, washes of sound that vibrate at risky frequencies — that is, frequencies in high and low ranges that are often curtailed or modified for mainstream music application. Throughout, repetition works to produce “desire creation” (Fink 2005.121) by shaping the ways the listener absorbs each artist’s narrative: first with the slow-dive drive of Reed’s “Disco Mystic” rhythm section and saxophone caw that propel Belcher’s candid tone and phrasing; second through the heavy, open space of my sonic treatment of Palma and that treatment’s stark contrast to Muscat’s unvarnished yet sensual storytelling. In this way, “Mystic Kill Me,” its narrative content, and its dynamic dub transitions and soundscapes not only risk the personal by speaking about radical and risky sexual ecologies and risk in relation to art and artistic practice, it takes risks that resist the status quo in sonic ways.

³² Salkind puts vibrotactility to work to “analyze the affective economies of bass-heavy frequencies like those underpinning The Warehouse sound” common in Chicago house musics (2019.60). This can also be applied to deep house music styles in general and Jamaican dub strategies where the low-end (that is, bass and sub-rhythm sections) produces powerful vibrations that are, literally, physical in affect.

HIV/AIDS, Its Intersections and Risky Representations

This theme connects with some of the representations of HIV/AIDS that were discussed in my interviews, and is reflected in the hybrid audio work "AIDS Not Over (Persistent Dialectics of Risk Mix)." This work tackles historical and current narratives of HIV/AIDS and the socio sonic spaces of the disco and the bathhouse as sites of risk, resistance, activism, and social change. "AIDS Not Over (Persistent Dialectics of Risk Mix)" is an audio work in three movements (without pause): "Continental Waves," "AIDS Not Over!" and "March of Biological Citizenship."

The work opens on soft animal pleasure sounds. Unfiltered by human meaning-making processes, these animal sounds represent unfiltered pleasure and desire. Soon, a spoken word passage begins: an introduction by Steve Ostrow, creator and manager of The Continental Baths in New York City, circa 1974. "This is a house of love." This sound citation represents the immensely influential power of possibility that radical MSM sex in the 1970s held in relation to heterosexual society. The original recording is drawn from an original RCA Red Seal vinyl recording (Red Seal was, at the time, RCA's prestige classic music imprint) of American operatic soprano Eleanor Steber performing, with violin accompaniment, at the renown (yet notorious) bathhouse to a packed house of Continental regulars (in towels) and members of Manhattan's social elite (in formal nightlife attire) who flocked to the venue for special performances like Steber's — and to witness what everyone was buzzing about: radical gay sexual liberation and its potential affect on broader society. Following on Ostrow's introduction of the diva, more musical phrases and structures begin to emerge as if out of clouds belched from a disco fog machine, and quickly crossfade (or transform) into more dynamic sounds of human male sexual interaction and pleasure. This secondary palette of sounds is culled from field recordings of a

Toronto gay bathhouse: unrestricted anonymous interactions and intimacies, spatialized sounds, occasional musical sounds (from the in-house DJ). This section crescendos into an intense, sustained wash of noise that becomes a pulse. The pulse is a signature composition tactic in my audio intervention as a whole: the pulse represents the core generative device in electronic music and I also use it as a metaphor for sexual (im)pulse and the spark of desire.

In the audio work's second movement, an instrumental bed comprised of original composition, instrumentation, and production—and sounds culled from “He’s All I’ve Got” (Love Unlimited, Unlimited Gold Records, 1976), “I Can’t Let Him Down” (Love Unlimited, Unlimited Gold Records, 1976), “Let No Man Put Asunder” (First Choice, 1977), and “Love for the Sake of Love” (Claudja Barry, London Records, 1976)—is foregrounded by vocalist and collaborator Robert Bolton. Bolton sings about the continuing social and political stigmatization, criminalization, and conditions (described by Cazdyn as “the new chronic” and “the already dead”) that locate HIV/AIDS — even as we move into an era where transmission of the virus is contained.³³ Bolton’s lyrics, produced in direct response to (or in collaboration with) my notes on the vexed intersection of HIV and disability, and a number of my dissertation-related writings-in-process, are as follows:

When my body is on record

It’s kind of soothing, when you find out you’re dead,
and alive, with the body as a conduit;
the epitaph written on my tomb said:
“He was not prudent, but he was kind of cute.”

When you’re not sure, but you’re positive,

³³ In the First Choice song, “Let No Man Put Asunder,” the lyrics include the lines, “It’s not over between you and me / It’s not over, I don’t want to be free.” Isolating and re-producing/effecting the phrase “it’s not over” opens space for a mondegreen (or “mishearing”) that can be understood or interpreted as “AIDS not over.”

oddly, your ID is tied to it.
 You resign to it; you feel like, "screw it."
 As you can't unscrew, cancel, or silence it.

When I'm turned on, there's always that red light lit.
 When my body is on record.

And it's kinda beautiful, when you realize your weapon
 is inside. The body is a conduit.
 There's a vibe to it. Ride 'til you die like you're Juliet.
 There's certain music and science to it.

When you're not certain, but you're positive,
 You might deny, try to hide, 'til you're like "screw it,"
 because you can't unscrew it, that's part of your music.
 Put it into your body. Put your body into it.

When I'm turned on, there's always this red light lit.
 When my body is on record.

It's kind of cruel, when you find out you're "it,"
 defined. And your body is a conduit
 for a virus, a sign, and some pharmaceuticals—
 markers of who's undesirable to whom.

When you're not valid, but you're positive,
 you resign to whatever's been assigned to you.
 At my funeral I hope that my tomb said:
 "He was not prudent, but he was kinda cute."

It's convoluted, when you find out you've been
 labeled a sodomite. The body is a conduit.
 You get called immoral, but you already knew that.
 So bundle it and glue it with bodily fluids.

When you're unpure, but you're positive.
 When you know what you want and you honour it.
 If I'm cruising, I'm choosing. I'm fine with the risks.
 Put it in your body. Put your body into it.

When my body is on record.

As Bolton focuses on the different meanings of “record,” he creates links to MSM sex and the dynamic continuum through images of the recording studio and notions of being “on” (*When I’m turned on, there’s always this red light lit. When my body is on record*), and concepts of HIV (and sexual) criminalization: *When my body is on record* also speaks to data and statistics records. This is the essence of body politic.

As this section of “AIDS Not Over (Persistent Dialectics of Risk Mix)” elevates in tone through a new rhythm section (that comprises the bass and beats) and a key change (shift to a different tonal colour). Sound citations from “Put Your Body In” (Stephanie Mills, 20th Century Fox Records, 1979) emerge from the tape delay feedback of Bolton’s voice. This track not only marks a point in the temporal trajectory of *Soft Subversions*, it responds echo-like to Bolton’s repetitive lyric “Put it in your body / Put your body in it.”

Visualizing and Writing *Lucid Dreaming Ludic Waking*

In this section, I briefly discuss the ways I use sound, vision, movement, and language as ambient expression and understanding of the original problematic of art/sex/risk in my video intervention, *Lucid Dreaming Ludic Waking*. Recommended viewing: after reading this section.

I use *lucid dreaming ludic waking* in my dissertation as an axis of understanding, and this particular intervention as a connection to the interviews where notions of dreaming and ludic work/play entangled with conversations about sex and art and risk and AIDS. I also use *lucid dreaming ludic waking* as a way to understand and express the oneiric and ideas of self-creation and agency in practices of “lucid dreaming,” the serious and the playful in “ludic,” and the disruption borders between dreaming and waking in queer temporalities and spatialities, and in

ludic, radical, and risky MSM sexual practices where normative notions of *telos* collide with *aphrodisiac*.

Throughout this sonic- and text-driven work, moving visuals of iconic disco objects occupy the screen, drifting slowly and seemingly without linear narrative as a conveyance of the non- and recombinant-teleologies that activate disco, house, and minimalist musics. The beams of light erupting on and casting from the surface of a rotating mirror ball slowly change colour saturation. Laser light generators rapidly oscillate in shape, pattern, and colour — sometimes translating into microbial-like organisms that appear to quake and shimmer in a day-glow petri dish. The mouth of a fog machine belches thick clouds that transform the socio-sonic space of the disco into a phantasmagorical dreamworld. I captured the socio-sonic/disco visuals on video at The Black Eagle disco club in summer 2018 during non-pubic hours. The Black Eagle disco occupies the back of the main floor, a space that was formerly a dark room until the club underwent serious renovations in 2013. These visuals not only convey the timelessness of the disco *zōe* that I describe earlier, it offers a close and detailed record of an infamous Toronto queer socio-sonic and sexual space.³⁴

As an ambient art work, I intend *Lucid Dreaming Ludic Waking* as a piece that can be watched or ignored or sensed in peripheral visions and background soundscapes; a surrounding. The turn to ambient, and that format's goals, are important in my research. On the subject of ambient music, Brian Eno writes,

In the early seventies, more and more people were changing the way they were listening to music. [P]eople were wanting to make quite particular and sophisticated choices about what they played in their homes and

³⁴ It is important to note, at this time, the value of this video document in the pandemic era defined by COVID-19. What will become of spaces like this disco, where people raised energy together while others fucked in the dark corners? What kinds of space will these activities activate in futures?

workplaces, what kind of sonic mood they surrounded themselves with. The manifestation of this shift was a movement away from the assumptions that still dominated record-making at that time—that people had short attention spans and wanted a lot of action and variety, clear rhythms and song structures [...] To the contrary, I was noticing that my friends and I were making and exchanging long cassettes of music chosen for its stillness [...] We wanted to use music in a different way—as part of the ambience of our lives—and we wanted it to be continuous, a surrounding. (Eno 2015a.94)

Eno's work in the field of ambient sound and vision creates an effective bridge between the avant-garde and mainstream music culture. From his point of view, I understand the disco visual component of my video as ambient affect. A representation of time standing still and understanding intersecting temporal and spatial trajectories of AIDS, art, sex and managed, radical risk-taking. This video can also be understood as anti-music video; it resists the temporal and teleological expectations of contemporary techno culture and media tentacles. My video seeks a position of full, radical singularity.

The score of *Lucid Dreaming Ludic Waking* comprises a dub version of "AIDS Not Over". Instrumentation takes the foreground and Bolton's language is subjected to audio production that reduces it to and treats it on more textural levels and meanings. Visual language appears/scrolls on-screen that I use to expand existing narratives in my dissertation and produce new meaning-making around issues of so-called safe space as an extension of safer sex protocols and the condom codex. What makes a disco a safe space and to whom? What does it mean when strategies deployed in practices of lucid dreaming (where the dreamer develops agency and takes action to respond to and resolve issues) are used in relation to ludic time, work, and play during waking hours? How can the ludic be used in relation to processes of self-creation and -determination and what ties the ludic to pastoral power?

Video duration: seven minutes and nine seconds. View *Lucid Dreaming Ludic Waking* at:
<<https://vimeo.com/449921144>>.

Conclusion

And it's kind of beautiful, when you realize your weapon / is inside. The body is a conduit. / There's a vibe to it. Ride 'til you die like you're Juliet. / There's certain music and science to it. / When my body is on record — Robert Bolton ("AIDS Not Over)

[T]hrough a window in an alley [...] Marilyn glimpsed two or four or six naked people—multiplied or confused, in a moment of astonished attention, by some mirror on the back wall, as the window itself added a prismatic effect to the bodies inside, glided by candlelight or some mustard bulb—before they moved behind a jamb, or she walked beyond the line of sight, the image suggesting proliferations of possibilities, of tales about those possibilities, of images in harmony, antiphon, or wondrous complementarity —Samuel R. Delany (2004.149).

Through my dissertation, I sought to understand risk and its productive and *otherwise possibilities* (Crawley 2017) in relation to art, artistic practice, music, and personal narratives (as a vector of artistic practice); sex, countersexuality, and the persistent dialectics of risky MSM sex and art over four decades of AIDS; ludic, radical, or risky sexual ecologies; and HIV/AIDS and its intersections and risky representations (both before and after PrEP and U=U). Through interviews and creative practice (especially music) as research method, I explored the ways that art and artistic practice engage with risk historically as well as in the current moment to provide temporal, spatial, sonic, and material opportunities and to put voluntary and managed self risk-taking to work in relation to HIV/AIDS and its activist narratives in Toronto's MSM and gay-identified sex communities. I clearly saw and heard and identified myself as an artist-researcher rather than a researcher-artist.

Arts and activist narratives are crucial in the present moment and movement, as the conversations with participants (and their practices) revealed. I used performative, sonic, and visual arts and activist narratives and the creative space of interpretation (the productive gap that emerges between creative intention and receptive significance) in ways that were intended

to pick-up at the place where language ends. This space of interpretation was evaluated, qua Sontag, *within a historical view of human consciousness*, and AIDS art and activism as resistance, *escaping the dead past*, and current cultural contexts where interpretation becomes *a liberating act*. I merged the social, political, medical, and experiential lessons of AIDS history—as a vital location of knowing—and recognized and activated the possibilities inherent in a PrEP/U=U landscape as one part of a large dynamic continuum of risk rather than a specific remedy. This *merging* is especially important as new viral worlds emerge around us.

In my dissertation, I explored the multidimensionality of risk (as ludic counternarrative), specifically through artists' worlds (others' and my own) as a way of rethinking histories of risk and reinserting them into a sexual/aesthetic world that is being billed as "risk free" through interrogation of historical/evolving narratives of AIDS, AIDS art, and MSM sex. Through this interrogation, I used creative processes and practices and music as vital means of knowing, being, seeing, and listening. I examined different literatures and identified interlocutors that interrogate sex in general and MSM sex specifically through the lenses of biopolitics, ethics, and creative narrative practices that risk the personal. I talked about biopolitics—with Foucault as one of my major interlocutors—in relation to the four central themes that emerged in the interviews. I organized my dissertation with these four themes. I responded to biopower through Foucault's concept of pastoral power and his politics of aesthetic self-creation: the production of subjects with individual agency or ipseity. I tracked the shifts from biopower and biopolitics (and the forms of disciplinary power that organise them) to new technologies of neoliberalism, such as psychopolitics, self-optimization, and smart power. In this shifting territory, I acknowledged the ways that corporeal legibility is entangled with concepts of normativity, and

the ways the norm—in heterosexual codes, laws, and imperatives—has been assimilated into MSM cultures through homonormativity and homonationalism. I argued that homonormativity is a form of gentrification that produces communities of banality and compliance. I argued that industrial mitigations of risk in MSM sex and AIDS are part of this gentrifying movement. All of these elements and movements were discussed and further developed in and through the interviews and the forms of artistic production and experiential knowledge that each interviewee brought to my dissertation.

I used creative and ludic approaches through interrogation of dreaming/waking states that allowed for sub- and un-conscious readings as self-creation and otherwise possibilities. I put sound, music, and listening to work as a key creative research method to link my artistic practice (historically and currently) to this research through sensory ethnography, participant listening, participant comprehension, interviews, and my dissertation's three interventions. I also used practices of sound, music, and listening to develop new knowledge of vinyl audio culture and the activist potential that that culture presents. This new knowledge culminates, in my research, through my audio intervention: *Soft Subversions*. At the heart of this work about risk and risky listening, seeing, sexing, and being are the ways that managed self risk-taking can produce agency, self-creation, and ipseity.

I interrogated risk's multiplicity of meanings and possibilities in practices of art and sex, and in unlocking the codes of the PrEP/U=U landscape in ways that extended beyond HIV transmission reduction. Through my research, I came to the conclusion that the PrEP/U=U landscape is a (recent) development or marker in historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and

art. PrEP and U=U form equal components in evolving, persistent dialectics of risk over four decades of AIDS, not revolutionary game-changing objects.

My sound intervention, *Soft Subversions*, comprised audio works that responded to the four themes that guide my dissertation through the repurposing of interview segments and sonic citations that were selected through the conceptual lens of the AIDS Playlist. I organized the sonic movements using the four themes that emerged through participant interviews. Throughout *Soft Subversions*, sonic citations from disco and house musics were used as kinds of time machines to reimagine these musics as authentic sounds of MSM sexual and cultural practices, and the AIDS crisis.

My video intervention, *Ludic Dreaming Ludic Waking*, responded to risk, sex, and HIV/AIDS through iconic images of MSM socio-sonic space, MSM sexuality, and the dark spaces of the disco where normative identities and meanings dissolve into light and fog. I created a space of mystery (the darkness that surrounds the mirror ball and its reflective beams) and sexual tension (the intense blast of light-drenched smoke from a fog machine suggests orgasm and release. I suggested social and anonymous sexual connectivity through beams of laser light that intersected and played with other beams, entangling momentarily before moving on to interact again and again. As the video played, a hybrid mix of sounds from *Soft Subversions* underscored text that scrolled across the screen. I used this text to represent key theoretical details in counterpoint with participant ideas, statements, and my own creative responses and impulses.

In my research, I found a world that is out of joint, so much so that disobedience should be an urgent act for everyone. I uncovered acts of political obedience, social conformity,

economic subjection, respect for authorities, and constitutional consensus that require new, queer instructions — instructions that encode risk as inherent in thinking, acting, and construction of new meaning-making and queer worlds. Queer worlds are *perfectly unreasonable* (Morris and Paasonen) in relation to biopolitics and neoliberalism. In located making and responding to art at the instructional heart of my dissertation's assertions.

It is, for me, impossible to come to further conclusions without acknowledging the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) that has emerged during the final stages of my research. COVID-19 shares many elements with AIDS: it is a virus that has achieved pandemic proportions (that is, there is, like AIDS, no outside to COVID-19), and has produced responses that target specific communities in biased ways. This moment offers a current, significant layer to my conclusion: the important role of sexual autonomy and citizenship in relation to disease futures and social, political, and economic responses. Thinking this through this moment, I imagine salvific sexual ecologies and futures to underscore the importance of imagination in philosophical and artistic practices and processes.

I used art and artistic practice to understand historical narratives of sex and AIDS, and to map the role of art and artist practice in relation to persistent dialectics of risk through and across four decades of AIDS. COVID-19, however, turns the tables once again. MSM and gay-identified men are still seeking sex in the early COVID-19 era, as online sites that cater to practices of barebacking in Toronto attest. Already new narratives of safety are emerging in these spaces. New negotiations are underway. New relations, desire, and affect are taking shape. Just today, I received an email from my city councilor outlining safer sex protocols during COVID-19.

I used practices of managed self risk-taking in art and sex to form a template for (pandemic) future understandings of intimacy, pursuits of pleasure, and the continued power of art to articulate complex and contradictory discourses of intimacy, resistance, sexual citizenry, and queer liberation theory. I explored and used concepts and strategies of risking the personal that can be dangerous while also acknowledging that life itself is risky and dangerous. The revolution to abolish homonormative and preinvented worlds is already underway and my argument in favour of risk adds fuel to that fight. From this crossroads, I located *Risky Beeswax* as a strategically innovative and artistic method for moving into and through pandemic futures, to respond to questions that may emerge in that movement.

Risk has been a vital location of HIV/AIDS-related artwork in significant ways, long before the advent of PrEP and U=U. My interviews indicated the following three outputs: 1) "risk" is a much more multi-valent concept and practice than can be measured according to one dimension (PrEP or U=U); 2) ideas and practices of risk have been important parts of many of my interviewees' art and activist practice(s) both before and since industrial mitigations of risk in sex and AIDS; and 3) any understandings of art/sex/risk in the current, PrEP/U=U landscape needs to attend to this history in order to make sense of the present situation, including historical/evolving narratives of MSM sex and art, and the other dimensions of risk that my work identifies and represents.

I used my positionality (including my HIV-positive status) through personal narratives to express ideas that some may find privileged. I did not direct this option to get places; I did so to share the information and the ideas, to help clarify risk as a productive option in practices of art and sex, and, perhaps, put my position of privilege to work in productive and risky ways. As a

white male, I was willing to run the risk of intellectual disobedience—that is, intellectual activism—in order to help others listen to and understand the possibilities and, in that way, create new entry points to activism and thinking for LGBTQI communities, members of MSM sexual communities who are isolated by moral shaming and stigmatizations within broader gay worlds, and for scholars of queer theory who are searching for sexier, riskier research expressions.

I learned that the medical industrial complex (*risky beeswax* in both literal and figurative senses) and chronic disease management produce harmful pathologies for people living with HIV in that they reduce them to sources of data collection for the taking instead of a thinking, feeling, sexual bodies that contain valuable experiential knowledge. To combat this narrative of harm, I explored examples of risk as a counternarrative that pressures the new chronic in creative ways, such as Andrews's reflections on Lazarus.

New questions opened up through my research process. If PrEP and U=U combine to pronounce, in public discourse, the death of the condom in relation to HIV, why is AIDS (still) not over? Why do stigma, fear, shame, and uncertainty continue to haunt people who live with HIV? What can we learn from the lessons of the AIDS pandemic in relation to viral and pandemic futures? While I propose liberating activations of contact, touch, and fluid-bound relations—activities that in the current moment appear more dangerous than ever—I conclude that my proposal can be used in futures that analyse and use historical narratives of sex and pandemic for new learning, understanding, and movement.

The risk to live and the right to love. Preciado's two-fold sentiment continues to move me, give me hope, even as I try to find ways to conclude this beeswax. I am confident his

sentiment will insert its way into future songs, love songs about rights, risk, and the experience of being alive, “The Ballad of the Biological Citizen.” On the B-side, “Love Theme of the Sexual Citizen.” Preciado reminded me that Foucault was the first philosopher of history to die from complications resulting from AIDS. “[Foucault] left us,” writes Preciado, “with some of the most effective tools for considering the political management of the epidemic [and] that the living (therefore mortal) body is the central object of all politics. There are no politics that are not body politics” (Preciado 2020a). Concepts of risk and rights guided the dynamic *continuum* through sexual experimentation and work by MSM who sought the kind of pleasure they wanted during wartime, and will guide us through present/future notions of sexual citizenship and sexual ecologies.

The rotating combinations of HAART that have kept me alive since 2005, when my CD4 count dropped below 200, not only deliver a form of medical miracle through the new chronic, they decode the cyborg for and *in* me. In this research, I pieced together this *inside* through Foucault’s *most effective tools*. I imagined darkroom futures and forms of touch—exterior and interior—that come with risk-taking, loving, and revolution; dark room futures that re/produced Delany’s *proliferation of possibilities*, harmony, antiphon, and wondrous complementarity. Preciado insists, “[w]e must go from a forced mutation to a chosen mutation” (2020a). In the end, I’d rather be a cyborg than a daddy.

I listened to artistic responses to the biopolitical and neoliberal managements of and investments in HIV/AIDS through historical and evolving songs of MSM sex and pandemic. I used and made sound artistic responses to these managements and investments, and imagined the part they take in the dynamic, noisy *continuum* of risk, that persistent dialectic of risk that runs

through and across four decades of HIV/AIDS, and sings oneiric, outlaw pandemic futures of pleasure. I was able to imagine, interpret, recognize, and use artistic responses because of Foucault's *most effective tools*. I created effective tools for listening to and sitting with ideas of personal care and management of pandemic, including the use and management of pleasure: individual, and in interaction with and through the body politic.

I learned that art and artistic practice can convey personal, risky truths that are important in narrowing the gap between so-called history and (personal) memory, and law-likely versus queer perceptions of risk. In this way, art can challenge its audience to re-evaluate their understanding of current socio-political climates and explore new ways of living with risk and interacting with others. But what remains a challenge, for me, is the inherent risk in coming to conclusions. Nothing is carved in stone and the concept of a conclusion seems at odds—strange, peculiar, queer—with the risks that I interrogated, analyzed, and represented. So-called “finished” art works are not the be all and end all, they are beginnings: successful art works initiate discussion. Art flows. Risk also flows, like the dynamic *continuum*, like zōe: infinite, vital, creative energy. The dynamic *continuum* does not stop, or even pause, to make conclusions. It keeps working, producing, taking risks. The setting of my dissertation requires some industrial thinking, a homogenized and gentrified outcome that is relatable. The setting of my audio intervention is less homogenized: the disco is a site of resistance, and the DJ is a semionaut who makes unlikely connections between sonic citations and non-teleological rhythms that create desire. The setting of my video is open-ended: music video streams, a gallery, a community centre digital programming screen, a living room, a personal device. Coming to conclusions is risky beeswax.

In risking the personal, I insist: don't take my risk for weakness. Don't take my risk for low self-esteem or self-destructiveness. Don't take my risk for death drive. Don't use my risk as a matchstick to illuminate moralizing practices of throwing shade.

Don't just manage, imagine *otherwise possibilities* in relation to risk, its vibrations and movement, and the socio-sonic events and sounds that are explored in this dissertation. Vibration, sonic event, and sound, as Crawley writes, "cannot ever be still absolutely" (2017.2). They keep going, they keep moving. They can be felt and detected but remain "almost obscure, almost unnoticed" (ibid).

It is the gift, the concept, the inhabitation of and living into *otherwise possibilities*. Otherwise, as word—otherwise possibilities, as phrase—announces the fact of infinite alternatives to what *is*. And what *is* is about being, about existence, about ontology. (Crawley 2019.2)

Put risk consciousness to work and imagine profits of pleasure and sectors of sexual stake-holding in creative and salvific terms, determine our bodies as sites of democracy and choice that are free from the politics of control and production of life that are organized by straight images, codes, and imperatives. Sexiles of the world, unite and take over!

The risk to live: take it. The right to love: own it.

Bend a little to find your sweet spot. Take a risk, for fuck's sake.

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