

## ‘Archives of feeling’:<sup>1</sup> the AIDS Crisis in Britain 1987

Mark Ashton found posthumous celebrity in 2014 in the film *Pride*, telling the story of a group of gays and lesbians from London who campaigned in support of striking miners and their families in 1984 - 5.<sup>2</sup> Many of them were moved to reciprocate that support - travelling to London in July 1985 to lead off Gay Pride with the colliery band. This was – the film suggests – an emotional encounter between apparently very different groups of people who mobilised in each other’s interests in a show of political solidarity articulated and perhaps experienced in terms of anger, compassion, empathy, and indeed pride - one of the emotions commonly if unevenly wrapped around ideas of gay identity and community for the last 40 years

In this article I show why we need to take such emotions in the past seriously and especially when we are trying to understand moments of crisis in which – as Walter Benjamin wrote in 1940 – ‘there can be a replacement of polity with an excitation of feelings’.<sup>3</sup> I hone in on a particular crisis - the AIDS epidemic in the UK; and a particular year: 1987. This was two years after the encounter of those ‘Pits and Perverts’ (as *The Sun* newspaper had it) and 6 years after the first known AIDS

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow the title from: Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2003).

This piece is an extended version of my inaugural lecture at Birkbeck, University of London delivered on Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> 2016. I am hugely grateful to Jeffrey Weeks, Sally Alexander, Bill Schwarz, and Andrew Whitehead for their comments on this piece.

<sup>2</sup> *Pride*, dir. Matthew Warchus, 2014

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, in Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Cape, 1970).

related death in the UK. AIDS here had rapidly become most associated with people with haemophilia infected through contaminated blood products, with drug users who had shared needles, with babies infected by their mothers, and with gay men infected through unprotected anal sex. There were cases of transmission through heterosexual vaginal sex, but this was widely seen to be part of the crisis as it unfolded elsewhere – in parts of Africa and Haiti, for example. The British press distinguished between innocent haemophiliacs and babies on the one hand, and drug users and homosexuals on the other. And of the latter pairing, it was homosexuals who were most frequently discussed in relation to the virus and devastating effects. This was because it was gay men who had been infected in the largest numbers in the UK and because they were already a demonised minority – and one which was developing a strident communal voice in part because of precedent political organising (arising out of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality and Gay Liberation, for example).

By the end of 1987 around 2,500 people more were known to be HIV positive in the UK; roughly 70% of these were thought to have contracted the virus through sex with another man. 610 people had died by this time – half in that year alone, signalling a marked escalation in the crisis. Amongst them was Mark Ashton, who died in February of that year at the age of 26. A few months later (in May) the Mass Observation social research project asked its panel of 1300 ‘ordinary’ people for its views on the intensifying crisis. 636 people responded with a total of 1,386 pages of largely handwritten testimony - forming an archive which gives us some shadowy sense of the emotional tumult surrounding AIDS in and around this particular year. One of just two gay men amongst that 633 was a friend of Marks, and before I say more about the AIDS crisis and about 1987, before I shape my argument via this and other archives, I want to cite his testimony at some length because it maps out the

coordinates of the emotional terrain I navigate in the rest of the piece. This, then, is part of what Mass Observer A1108, a 28-year-old local government worker from London, wrote I relation to the death of his friend:

A mutual friend [of Mark's] who works in the same building as me asked me to go out to the corridor with her [...] . She waited until no one was around and then told me that Mark had been taken into hospital in the final stages of the disease [...] . I went back to my office and telephoned my partner to tell him that Mark was very ill. When he asked me what was wrong with him I did not say because I was afraid that the others in my office, hearing that I knew someone with AIDS, would not associate me with it. I went into the men's toilets and cried. On the day he died, the same mutual friend called me at work and asked me to meet me outside her office. She told me that she had been with him that morning when he died. We stood in the corridor and both cried and when one of her colleagues passed us to ask what was wrong she said that Mark had been run over by a car and died after being in a coma. Her colleagues were very sympathetic. Later one of them heard her in the staff canteen telling her boyfriend what had really happened. When she came into work the next day they had moved her desk to the far side of the room and refused to speak to her. One man told her that he couldn't risk contact with her as he had children. She left her job shortly after.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mass Observation Archive (hereafter MOA), The Keep Record Office, Brighton, Spring 1987: AIDS campaign, Mass Observer (hereafter MOer) A1108; see also A1108's 'Special Report' (submitted June 21<sup>st</sup> 1988). MOers can respond beyond the remit of directives with so-called 'special reports'.

Apart from expressing his ‘fear’ of being overheard in the office when he called his boyfriend, this Mass Observer (MOer) A1108 does not say how he felt about Mark’s death and what happened to this mutual friend. He describes crying – twice – but not how he felt. A complex knot of emotion might well have fuelled those tears – grief at the loss of Mark and other friends; a sense of isolation at not being able to share this news openly; fear perhaps for himself. As he wrote these words he may also have been recalling feelings felt two weeks after Mark’s death when a passer-by at Heathrow Airport called him a ‘filthy AIDS queer’ after seeing him kiss his boyfriend goodbye on the cheek.<sup>5</sup>

There is no certainty in my emotional guesswork. Inhabiting and understanding one’s own emotional life can be hard enough; trying to comprehend the emotions of people in the past feels like grasping retreating shadows. The people in the testimony shared an apparently straightforward language of emotion – and one familiar to us too. But words like hate, fear and love can mean and might relate to different things in different historical contexts. And at any historical moment they described and also evoked a range of thoughts and feelings. Different dimensions of fear were probably experienced by Mark as his illness developed, by his friends (including our MOer), by their partners, and by the office mate keen to protect his children, for example. Emotions were experienced and expressed differently depending on where these people were standing in relation to the crisis and those most directly affected by it.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> MOA, AIDS campaign, MOer A1108.

<sup>6</sup> William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 322; Monique Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A

Unlike many of his fellow MOers, MOer A1108 seems reticent in using emotions directly to describe what happened. There is a sense of containment in his simple descriptive prose here and in his description of the incident at Heathrow. This might relate (more guesswork) to the necessity felt by many gay men and their allies at this time to hide from general view the grief, anxiety, anger, guilt, and shame experienced in the context of serial loss and an anti-gay backlash trading in blame and fear. Heather Love suggests that such negative feelings are ‘like Xs marking the spot where the social is at work on us’.<sup>7</sup> Intense, exhausting grief and enduring anxiety were perhaps difficult to articulate amidst the loud proclamations that gay men were getting their just desserts. MOer A1108 may, like others, have felt numb in the midst of this devastation, loss and profound uncertainty.

Whatever the emotional underpinning of MOer A1108’s testimony, the writing gives the impression of a man quietly sharing something ‘true’ in a period when gay men were commonly associated in the media with deceit, selfishness and pretence.<sup>8</sup> The actual veracity of this kind of testimonial evidence is perhaps less important than what it might signal about the emotional habitus of the UK in the context of the AIDS crisis as it was unfolding in 1986 and 1987. These years saw a

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Bourdieuian Approach to Understanding Emotion,” *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012): 210.

<sup>7</sup> Heather Love, ‘Emotional Rescue’, in David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, *Gay Shame* (University Of Chicago Press, 2010), 258.

<sup>8</sup> On these characterisations see: Matt Cook, ‘AIDS, Mass Observation and the Fate of the Permissive Turn’ in *Journal of the History of Sexuality* (forthcoming 2017); Cook, ‘AIDS in London’ in Simon Avery and Kate Graham, *Sex, Time and Place: Queer Histories of London, c.1850 – the present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

shift from what Virginia Berridge calls ‘policy from below’ driven by mobilising community groups in the early 1980s to a period of ‘wartime emergency’ during which the World Health Organisation launched a global programme on AIDS and the UK government finally rolled out a concerted ‘Don’t Die of Ignorance’ public health campaign in the face of the growing death toll.<sup>9</sup> In February 1987 television broadcasters grappled with the crisis in a co-ordinated week of relatively measured ‘AIDS week’ programming. Escalating coverage in the tabloid press went in the opposite direction and curated voices articulating disgust, distrust and anger at the immorality, neediness, mendacity and guilt of gay men in particular. The other gay MOer in the sample volunteered for a gay and lesbian press monitoring project (now known as the Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive, LAGNA) and reported in his 1987 response to the directive on AIDS that there had been ‘a larger crop of directly gay bashing [newspaper] reports’ – ‘from a handful to about 30 per month’.<sup>10</sup>

For all its restraint, the words of MOers A1108 communicated something of what emotions meant for everyday life then. Here and in other oral and written testimony from gay men in this period we can often observe a turning inwards – towards the self as well as towards others also immediately affected.<sup>11</sup> Protective circles of support (in this case formed between young gay and straight friends and

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<sup>9</sup> Virginia Berridge, *AIDS in the UK: The Making of a Policy, 1981-1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>10</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B1106.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the Hall-Carpenter oral history collection in the National Sound Archive at the British Library. Extracts are collected in: Hall Carpenter Archives. Gay Men’s Oral History Group, *Walking after Midnight: Gay Men’s Life Stories* (London: Routledge, 1989).

their partners) arose in part because of the urgent care needs of those ill and dying; in part because of rising disdain for gay men.<sup>12</sup> That disdain fuelled an imperative to secrecy which in turn perhaps compounded the anxiety circulating in the office MOer A1108 describes – and notably deflected by one office worker from himself to his children. Mark’s woman friend had (like her gay friends) not been straightforward. In consequence she was not only distanced physically but also ostracised. Her deceit perhaps resonated for them with a wider belief evident in MOers testimonies and broader polling that people were not being told the whole truth about HIV and AIDS by government and scientists. Conspiracy theories abounded. The virus was identified (and a test developed) in 1985, but although transmission routes became clearer as a result, there was a continuing climate of uncertainty about degrees of risk. If the Terrence Higgins Trust and other AIDS charities were offering specific sexual safety advice in their leaflets and campaigns by 1987, the looming icebergs and gravestones featured in the public health campaign of 1986 and 1987 underscored a sense of general threat and doom.

Another friend of Mark Ashton’s, Jimmy Somerville of pop duo the Communards, wrote a song for him in the months following his death. ‘For a Friend’ was released late in 1987 and laid out his emotional investments. His words evoke a gay emotional community (‘somewhere else, someone is crying too, another man has lost a friend, I bet he feels the way I do’), a potent grief (‘I’ve never cried the way I’ve cried over you’) and the connection of these feelings and events to a new activism (‘tears have turned, turned to anger and contempt; I’ll never let you down, a

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<sup>12</sup> Emotional regimes, Ahmed shows, provide vivid reinforcement of inside and outside. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 10.

battle I have found’). Somerville ‘s song describes how he and Mark had protested together ‘arm in arm’ ‘for love and pride’ – as at the march headed by the Dulais Valley Colliery band in the summer of 1985. There was, Douglas Crimp suggests, a pressing connection between ‘mourning and militancy’ in this context, and a felt need in the midst of the crisis to remember, connect, support and protest. 1987 was the year when the first panel of the UK AIDS memorial quilt was sewn (including one for Mark), and it was also the year when construction began on the UKs first dedicated AIDS hospice, the Lighthouse in Ladbroke Grove, west London. It was built on the back of huge fundraising efforts largely from within what was beginning to look like a more cohesive gay and lesbian community. Gay Pride in June 1987 saw larger numbers than ever before - an estimated 40,000 (up from 15,000 in 1985).

Such gay defiance, *Times* columnist Bernard Levin suggested at the time, exacerbated antipathetic feelings among the broader public. Though he condemned the ‘galloping frenzy of hate’ against homosexuals in his opinion piece of December 1987, he noted that the promiscuity, ‘outré’ behaviour and campaigning of a ‘minority of homosexuals’ was ‘well calculated to disgust heterosexuals, including many who were sympathetic.’<sup>13</sup> In his comments Levin choreographs a dance of ‘hate’, ‘disgust’, and (lost) ‘sympathy’. Almost thirty years later Somerville described in an interview with the *Independent* how his life was still marked by this period, by this poisonous emotional climate signalled by Levin, and by Mark’s death. Though his songs appear

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<sup>13</sup> Bernard Levin, ‘Bring on the Gaystapo: The way we live now’, *The Times*, 28.12.1987



in *Pride* ‘he couldn’t bear to watch it in the cinema as it would “make him ball his eyes out”’.<sup>14</sup>

This article tugs the emotional threads from MOer A1108’s testimony and Somerville’s song and interview through other archival collections I have been exploring in an effort to map the emotional terrain of this particular year. I thus look at a general anxiety about HIV and AIDS (which we saw in the office building where MOerA1108 and Mark’s friend worked), specific disdain for gay men and their allies (suggested in the incident at Heathrow and the ostracism Mark’s friend experienced), and fear for children on the part of parents especially (signalled in the comment from one of the office workers). I look too at the embattled position gay men often found themselves in and the ways this fired activism – something identifiable in MOer A1108’s testimony and Somerville’s lyrics. And I consider emotional legacies which cling to and unfold in our present and which were poignantly conjured by Somerville in his recent interview. I suggest that the newspaper press set an emotional tenor which the social actors of the time absorbed and reacted against. And I show how the government’s health campaign was inflected by the emotions that they expected from an abstractly conceived ‘public’. If the popular press sensationalised and shocked public opinion, government also incited fears and horror.

Overall I make three interconnected arguments which I have already begun to sketch out. The first is about the power of emotional rhetoric to shape what was felt, said, and done. The second is about the ways in which people were caught in

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Jimmy Somerville Interview: “I wanted people to love me”’, *The Independent*, 28.2.2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/jimmy-somerville-interview-i-wanted-people-to-love-me-10076014.html> (Accessed 10.10.2106).

communities of feelings and particular styles of emotional expression which were hard to move against because they appeared so obvious and self evident. I argue too, though, that with sometimes small gestures and because of cross cutting affiliations people often also pushed against such seeming emotional imperatives (as Mark's friend in the office did). The third strand of argument is about the significance of testimonial archives in helping us tell this more nuanced and complex story – allowing us to intervene in sweeping or oversimplified cultural memories of this period (as a time only of acute polarisation, for example). Such archives suggest ways in which emotional styles and expectations change over time, yet retain threads of continuity which haunt us now.

#### *Archives and communities of emotion*

The collections I visited were saturated with emotion (sometimes articulated, sometimes not), making these archival encounters amongst the most moving I have had. They prompted memories of my own young adulthood and the feelings which underpinned everyday experiences and decisions I made at the time - about coming out, moving to London, becoming more political, forming intimate relationships and friendships, or returning to study. The jolt I experienced when encountering these materials was fired in part by echoes of these earlier feeling. Emotions in this sense are archival.<sup>15</sup> They hold in store fragments and layers of affect which relate not only to my earlier personal experiences but also to the social contexts in which I lived them. Queer histories in particular, Ann Cvetkovitch suggests, demand a particular sensitivity to such traces of intimacy, desire, love, hate, pain, shame and stigma which have framed and modulated identifications, identities and 'moments of community'

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<sup>15</sup> Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 242.

for queerly identified people.<sup>16</sup> Part of the queer historical project requires listening for feelings that can be too ephemeral to leave their mark but which were yet fundamental to the ways lives were lived and so to the queer social histories I am pursuing.<sup>17</sup>

The archives I consulted were diverse. I explored clippings from the mainstream press collated from 1982 by gay volunteers (including the MOer I cited earlier) moved to monitor burgeoning anti-gay vitriol in the media. Their work now forms part of the Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive at Bishopsgate Institute. Tacking through the vast online Youtube archive took me through visual and televisual materials, reminding me of the power they hold in marshalling emotion. I tracked government and Independent Broadcasting Authority discussions about the 1986 - 87 public health campaign through minutes, memos and letters at the National Archive, and through similar official materials (though in a different key) at the IBA archive at the University of Bournemouth.<sup>18</sup> I spent time with the newsletters, letters, and clippings held in the Friends and Family of Lesbians and Gays (FFLAG)

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<sup>16</sup> A concept explored in: Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "queer"* (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press, 2006), chap. Intro.

<sup>17</sup> Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 242–44; Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame*. Queer studies has indeed been at the forefront of the so-called 'affective turn'. See also: Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007); Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*; Halperin and Traub, *Gay Shame*; Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*.

<sup>18</sup> I am very grateful to Lucy Robinson for sharing her research on this collection with me.

collection at the Manchester City Library, and with written testimonies by gay men gathered between 1986 and 1991 by the National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS) in response to a series of questions on gay men and health. The NLGS was initiated by the same MOer who volunteered for the gay press monitoring project and is further evidence of the felt need, his felt need, to gather and record experiences at a moment when many felt embattled, silenced, and at risk.<sup>19</sup> The NLGS is held at the Keep archive in East Sussex alongside testimonies gathered by the Mass Observation project – the material I worked on most substantively and which is the lodestone of my discussion here.

Mass Observation in its first and probably most well-known incarnation ran from 1937 to the early 1950s. It represented a radical attempt to glean attitudes from a panel of ‘ordinary’ people. It was re-launched in 1981 with a directive seeking views from a newly assembled panel on the Royal wedding and Margaret Thatcher’s government. From then on it has issued some three directives to its panel each year – including the one the AIDS crisis in May 1987 which prompted the testimonies I navigate here. That directive asked MOers:

to direct your attention to the campaign in the press, on television and through public meetings. If you have attended any of the latter it would be very useful if you would report on attendance, questions asked, comments heard afterwards etc. There are, in addition and inevitably,

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<sup>19</sup> A similar impulse lay behind the Hall-Carpenter oral history and archive project, established in the 1980s. Now split between three sites: the Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive (LAGNA) is at Bishopsgate Institute; the oral history collection is in the National Sound Archive at the British Library; the politics, groups and ephemera collection is in the London School of Economics Archive.

rumours and, no less inevitably ‘jokes’ which should be recorded.

Have you noticed changes of any sort in your local circle which could be related to knowledge or fears about AIDS? Has your own behaviour been affected at all in any way?<sup>20</sup>

Two thirds of the 636 responses were from women – a roughly typical proportion of MOers responding in this period. All respondents were self-selecting and had the time and inclination to contribute to the project. They were not representative of the larger UK population demographically – something I discuss further in a companion piece to this.<sup>21</sup>

Others have observed the emotional tenor of MO testimony in general.<sup>22</sup>

Directives often asked specifically about feelings (here note the invitation to comment on ‘fears’ about AIDS) and the language of emotion is one that correspondents were familiar with and used frequently in their writing. Emotional language was a way of adding force to opinion and to bigotry. It is particularly evident in responses to this directive on AIDS, reflecting the wider emotional tenor. By the time MOers were writing in June 1987, discourse on the syndrome had become highly charged – a sign, perhaps, that the potent fears evoked by the crisis related not only to the HIV virus

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<sup>20</sup>MOA, Spring 1987 directive, ‘The Campaign Against AIDS’.

<sup>21</sup> Cook, ‘AIDS, Mass Observation and the Fate of the Permissive Turn’.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example: Ian Gazely and Claire Langhamer, “The Meanings of Happiness in Mass Observations Bolton,” *History Workshop Journal* 75 (Spring 2013); Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2015).

and AIDS but (as I will go on to suggest) to the idea of promiscuous, unbounded bodies and their threat to home and family, and to sex, sexuality and sexual difference and their relationship to the state. It was not only an epidemiological phenomenon but ‘an epidemic of signification’.<sup>23</sup> Multiple and proliferating meanings and anxieties clung to those four letters.<sup>24</sup>

I stay close to these various archives here – focussing mostly on MOer testimonies but drawing them into oblique conversation with materials from the other collections. I do this to signal emotional resonance and ricochet between different levels of discourse and to marshal an ‘archive of feeling’. This is the beautifully evocative phrase Ann Cvetkovich’s uses to describe the complex accumulation of emotion in cultural texts produced through lesbian and gay lives and politics in the US in the 1980s and 1990s especially. These include documentaries, diaries, literary and other writings, and spaces of community.<sup>25</sup> My ‘archive of feeling’ relating to the UK

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<sup>23</sup> Paula A. Treichler, “AIDS, Homophobia and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification,” *Cultural Studies* 1, no. 3 (October 1, 1987): 263–305.

<sup>24</sup> On the “epidemic of signification” in relation to AIDS see also: Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Allen Lane, 1989); Paula A. Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), chap. 2; L.A. Nisbet and D.V McQueen, “Anti-Permissive Attitudes to Lifestyles Associated with AIDS,” *Social Science and Medicine* 36, no. 7 (1993): 893; Catherine Waldby, *AIDS and the Body Politic* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3–4; Elizabeth Fee and Daniel M. Fox, eds., *AIDS: The Burdens of History*, 1988, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 9. See also: Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Janet Staiger, Ann

AIDS crisis is constituted by tracking the emotive pulse running through collections in ‘traditional’ archives. This material helps to show how emotions are never ‘only’ personal but are woven into attempts to voice, prompt and persuade in a multitude of places and social practices, from the domestic to the operations of the state. They are a motor of social change and, Joanna Bourke argues, ‘at the heart of historical experience’.<sup>26</sup>

Through this material I seek out overlapping and cross-cutting ‘emotional communities’, a concept medievalist Barbara Rosenwien’s uses as a way of thinking about shared emotional registers and styles at particular historical moments and in particular places.<sup>27</sup> Assurance of belonging to such a community perhaps gave the stranger at Heathrow tacit permission to hurl his invective at MOer A1108 and allowed those office workers to ostracise Mark’s friend with impunity. The emotions witnessed, felt or ‘merely’ articulated by these people had substantial power to shape and justify their actions. The affective communities to which they belonged thus created contexts in which certain emotions were anticipated or accepted. They provided parameters for reaction and feeling<sup>28</sup> and they served to include and exclude, and to reinforce divisions between individuals and groups.<sup>29</sup>

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Cvetkovich, and Ann Morris Reynolds, eds., *Political Emotions* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> J. Bourke, “Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotion in Modern History,” *History Workshop Journal* 55, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 111–33.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwien, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 1, 2002): 821–45.

<sup>28</sup> Scheer, “Are Emotions a Kind of Practice”; Deborah Gould, “The Shame of Gay Pride in Early AIDS Activism”, in Halperin and Traub, *Gay Shame*, 225.

Communities of emotion are relational and dynamic. They are articulated, experienced and come into focus through social interaction and they provoke a range of human reactions. The apparent anger, disgust, and fear of the ‘moral majority’ (and the assumption that they would respond like that) was part of what configured the emotional, practical and political responses of queerer ‘others’. This was a complex emotional dance, however, and not least because such separated camps never existed in such stark, clearly demarcated ways. As Simon Watney notes, these divisions were dramatized in the press, ‘positioning gay men against straight as if daily life were indeed lived in such polarities’.<sup>30</sup> The everyday involved more cross over and contingencies than media representations allowed.

### *Governing AIDS*

Margaret Thatcher was returned to power in May 1987, the same month as the AIDS directive was released to MOers. A recurrent theme of the election campaign was the need for a common sense return to ‘lost’ values associated with hard work, thrift, self-sufficiency and moral rectitude. The government had already signalled a desire to stem the putative permissive tide and to counter ‘loony’ left-wing local and education authorities. Metropolitan councils (including the Greater London Council) were dissolved in 1986 and in the same year the Education Act tightened control over sex education in schools and allowed parents to withdraw their children from such

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<sup>29</sup> Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 264; Gazely and Langhamer, “Meanings of Happiness,” 172.

<sup>30</sup> Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* (London: Comedia, 1986), 86.



classes. Children, Thatcher told the Conservative Party conference of 1987, were being ‘cheated’ of ‘a sound start in life’ by being taught that they had an ‘inalienable right to be gay’. Clause 28 of the Local Government Act was on the cards and once it passed into law a year later libraries, schools and council run museums and galleries were forbidden from ‘promoting’ homosexuality as a ‘pretended’ family unit. There were echoes in this of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act which partially decriminalised sex between two men over 21 in private. The measure, as I have argued elsewhere, was a gesture of tolerance tacitly offered on condition of good, discreet behaviour.<sup>31</sup> The later 1980s saw a rear-guard attempt to shore up those conditions in the context of greater gay and lesbian visibility - visibility associated with local council action on equality, with an expanding commercial and political gay scene, and with greater representation in the arts and media which often grappled with the AIDS crisis itself.

Thatcher’s support for Clause 28 was in part an appeal for a time before the 1960s when codes of conduct were apparently clearer, and when ideas of home and family underpinned pride in a nation now under threat from homosexual and other moral outliers. The government mobilised fear in this respect – fear of how gay men might affect public health and morality and fear of how they might corrupt or threaten children in the classroom, in the street, and in the home. Marshalling such fears proved a smart electoral strategy. The British Social Attitudes survey of 1987 found that 74% of their sample of 1,700 people thought ‘homosexual relations were always or mostly wrong’, compared to 62% in 1983.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cook, ‘AIDS, Mass Observation and the Fate of the Permissive Turn’.

<sup>32</sup> Roger Jowell, Sharon Witherspoon, and Lindsay Brook, eds., *British Social Attitudes: The 5th Report* (Aldershot: Gower, 1988), 36.

The messages coming from government were nevertheless confused and confusing. If Thatcher was hitting a strident note on moral values, Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, Norman Fowler, steered a liberal course in terms of AIDS health policy - following the advice of health professionals, epidemiologists and even historians.<sup>33</sup> Hard pressed local councils meanwhile attempted to meet their statutory responsibilities in providing social care and adequate housing for people with AIDS diagnoses. Some local councillors were vocal in their support of gay men and other minorities; others were equally fervent as they denounced the preferential treatment gays were supposedly receiving – treatment which, as ‘guilty parties’, they surely did not deserve.<sup>34</sup> Public discourse became an amalgam of liberal and reactionary pulses.

In cabinet Fowler encountered resistance to his plans for a mass leaflet drop to every household in the country. Government memos repeatedly cautioned against introducing an AIDS leaflet into the nation’s homes. In a scrawled note on a letter from the Department of Health and Social Security, Thatcher wrote that she thought ‘the anxiety on the part of parents and others who would never be in danger of AIDS exceeds the good [a leaflet ] may do’. She ‘feared’ children ‘could read and learn of practices they never knew about’. ‘Wouldn’t just VD clinics, public toilets, doctors surgeries be more appropriate?’ she asked - tacitly rearticulating the sanctity of the home and sketching out a presumed topography of risk and perverse knowledge.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Virginia Berridge and Philip Strong, eds., *AIDS and Contemporary History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Berridge, *AIDS in the UK*.

<sup>34</sup> On this see: Cook, ‘AIDS in London’.

<sup>35</sup> Note by M. Thatcher on a letter from Tony Laurance (Dept. of Health and Social Security) to Mark Addison (Private Secretary to the PM), 5.3.1986. National Archive:

Welsh Secretary Nicholas Edwards wrote to Fowler that he felt the ‘sensitivity of every parent’ needed to be borne in mind when embarking on a leafleting campaign.<sup>36</sup> Government discussion focussed on emotions that might be prompted in the ‘public’ (‘worry’, ‘alarm’, ‘offence’, ‘fear’ and ‘panic’ for instance). These fears were perhaps a deflection of ministers’ own feelings as they pitched (masculine) ‘rational’ government against the (feminised) ‘emotional’ public whose unpredictable responses needed to be contained and controlled.<sup>37</sup> The tardy response of government (a full five years after the first UK case) and the internal resistance to the public health campaign signal concern about how to engage with these issues in a suitably public voice.

Government discussions of the AIDS crisis were saturated with feelings which circumscribed political horizons and what it felt possible to do, say and defend.<sup>38</sup> Councils looking to equalities measures and education in schools as an alternative way of responding were labelled ‘loony’. A 64-year-old MOer called for the prosecution of Labour councils ‘for crimes against the people of this country’ in ‘promoting homosexuality in schools’ and ‘diverting attention from the real culprits such as perverts and drug addicts’.<sup>39</sup> Bernard Levin in his ‘Bring on the Gaystapo’ *Times* opinion piece cited earlier made a similar connection between war crimes and

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PREM-19-1863\_156. A version of these views was returned to Laurance in a memo sent from the PM’s office on 6 March 1986; National Archive, PREM-19-1863\_155.

<sup>36</sup> Nicholas Edwards to Norman Fowler, 28 August 1986, National Archive: PREM-19-1863\_106.

<sup>37</sup> Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*; on the gendering of emotional response see: Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Gould, “The Shame”, in Halperin and Traub, *Gay Shame*, 228.

<sup>39</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B1442.

the danger of gays and their left winger allies. Under a headline which drew immediate parallels to the Nazi secret police (and just after the prosecution in France of Nazi Gestapo chief Klaus Barbie in May 1987), Levin described how some homosexuals had ‘had adopted an ‘aggressive tone [...] campaigning for their “rights”, abetted by hard-left local councils’.<sup>40</sup> The public were apparently right to be angry – and afraid.

In the extensive internal debate about the material to be presented in the public health campaign there was the stated intention to avoid such judgements and to encourage a realistic appraisal of risk. Many MOers nevertheless took exception to what they saw as scaremongering imagery of icebergs and gravestones in the campaign as it was finally aired and distributed. Help lines crashed as large numbers of worried well calling in fearful response to the leaflet.<sup>41</sup> Several MOers meanwhile bracketed AIDS with nuclear threat and so to the broader sense of risk and danger which Anthony Giddens sees at the heart of self-identity in late modernity.<sup>42</sup> They were writing only a year after the Chernobyl nuclear power station disaster in April 1986. The catastrophe led to fears about the spread of nuclear fall-out – an invisible yet deadly agent rather like the HIV virus. Perhaps predictably AIDS was described as

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<sup>40</sup> Levin, ‘Bring on the Gaystapo’.

<sup>41</sup> Cook, *A Gay History of Britain* (London: Greenwood, 2007), ; see also: Report on ‘HEC [Health Education Council] Workshop: Regional Responses to AIDS’, 5.12.1986, IBA Archive, Bournemouth University, folder: AIDS TV coverage, Oct.1986 – Feb. 1987, 426.307.

<sup>42</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. (Polity Press, 1991), chap. 4; John Tulloch and Deborah Lupton, *Television AIDS and Risk* (St Leonards NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1997) intro.

‘a moral Chernobyl’ by one paper - a headline chosen by Mary Whitehouse for the cover of her condemnatory report on ‘Television Programmes and AIDS’ which she released early in 1987.<sup>43</sup> The ‘Don’t Die of Ignorance’ campaign itself meanwhile carried a muted echo of the ‘Protect and Survive’ leaflet which was distributed to households a decade earlier to advise on how to endure a nuclear disaster – the potential dimensions and impact of which on London and Sheffield were explored subsequently (and respectively) in TV series *The Old Men at the Zoo* (1983) and TV film *Threads* (1984). The government, according to some MOers, was not doing enough to offset such emotive impact; anxiety was hard to contain.

*Everyday anxieties and geographies of risk*

The government, its health campaign, and the media provided a language to describe both AIDS and those most directly affected by it, suggesting modes of response – ranging from angry finger pointing to excessive caution. There was certainly a wide emotional repertoire in MOer responses. There were the horrified, the incensed, the anxious, the frightened and even terrified. ‘I am in a continual state of worry about AIDS’, wrote a 58-year-old secretary.<sup>44</sup> ‘I had a momentary pang of disquiet’, said a social worker after having to section ‘a homosexual whom I learned later had AIDS antibodies’.<sup>45</sup> Another reported her own mild anxiety around gay people but also described her friend who was ‘neurotically obsessed with the possibility of getting

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<sup>43</sup> National Viewers and Listeners Association, Report on Television Programmes and AIDS’ (1987), IBA Archive at Bournemouth University, folder: AIDS TV Coverage Feb. – July 1987, 5016, 428 – 301.

<sup>44</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer 1650.

<sup>45</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B1533.

AIDS and it is spoiling her life'.<sup>46</sup> She was not alone in orienting herself in this way. Many defined their calmer, measured feelings against 'neurotic', 'furious' or 'raving' others.

Describing an emotion did not always mean feeling it; and conversely an emotion might not be explicitly articulated but might nevertheless be deeply felt (as I surmised with the opening testimony from MOer A1108). Emotions might sometimes be inferred from the changes people made to their daily lives in response to the perceived threat of the virus and reports of heterosexual transmission.<sup>47</sup> A 65-year-old retired secretary felt rather differently about homosexuals now 'the virus affects normal couples'. This, she said, is 'the most alarming aspect'.<sup>48</sup> Such 'alarm' and associated anxiety seems often to relate to a sense of amorphous threat. A 53-year-old publisher from the south east noted that 'we had to visit London, and I have to admit that in the rush hour we felt very much aware that we might be in a hazardous zone.'<sup>49</sup> Her concern was echoed by another MOer:

Last month I had occasion to travel up to Oxford Street tube station [...] a young man coughed quite close to me and the swaying motion of the train brought the exhaled breath nearer to me. Perhaps I might have caught a cold from him this way. [...] The thought that this - while being a nuisance - was a

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<sup>46</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B787.

<sup>47</sup> On such reports and projections see: Gray, "Resourcing" in David Fitzsimons, Vanessa Hardy, and Keith Tolley, eds., *The Economic and Social Impact of AIDS in Europe* (London: Cassell, 1995); John Bongaarts, "Global Trends in AIDS Mortality," *Population and Development Review* 22, no. 1 (March 1, 1996): 21–45.

<sup>48</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B1522.

<sup>49</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer D1974

fact of life in 20<sup>th</sup> century living but the thought of passing strangers being AIDS carriers was quite another matter!<sup>50</sup>

Other MOers beyond the capital felt relief. ‘I don’t really think it has hit Derbyshire yet’, wrote one woman.<sup>51</sup> A 47-year old librarian from North Wales meanwhile described feeling ‘blasé’ because although there is ‘the odd homosexual’ locally and some people ‘are promiscuous’ it is ‘a far greater problem in London or Liverpool’ (probably her nearest city).<sup>52</sup>

Though internal government polling following the public health campaign of 1986/1987 suggested that 84% of the sample felt confident that they now knew enough to avoid the risk of contracting HIV,<sup>53</sup> there were yet high levels of anxiety amongst a significant minority of MOers – an well beyond the capital. Many were worried about visiting particular places. Hospitals were cited most often - especially in relation to blood transfusions, a hangover from earlier transmission routes (though all blood products were now screened following the introduction of a reliable test in 1985). Several were nervous of dentists – including one MO who had to visit his in Brixton, home of many ‘coloureds’ who, according to him, had ‘started it.’<sup>54</sup> Others were nervous of taking communion at church (many dipped their wafer rather than

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<sup>50</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer L1290.

<sup>51</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B78.

<sup>52</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer 1724.

<sup>53</sup> ‘AIDS Advertising Evaluation’, report by British Market Research Bureau for Central Office of Information (April 1987), in Department of Health ‘Steering Group on the AIDS public Information Campaign, part 1’, National Archive JA 235/28/1.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example: MOA, AIDS, MOer C1894.

drinking directly from the cup)<sup>55</sup> and of visiting hairdressers (a couple of MOers took their own comb and scissors; another refused to let her daughter have her ears pierced by the hairdresser ‘as the chap is known to be gay’).<sup>56</sup> More than one MOer avoided swimming pools and second hand clothes shops.<sup>57</sup> One charity shop in the South East had apparently stopped taking men’s trousers and now ‘refused to allow transvestites to try on clothing’ (tantalisingly suggesting a time before when transvestites had been at liberty to do this).<sup>58</sup> A local fish and chip shop was ‘almost ruined’ in Peterborough after the local paper reported that an ‘AIDS victim’ had gone inside feeling ill and asked them to call an ambulance. Only after local clergymen and councillors went to buy meals did custom pick up again<sup>59</sup>

‘Normal’ homes might be safe but the homes of ‘AIDS sufferers’ were especially risky – the very opposite of what home should be.<sup>60</sup> There was a press outcry on behalf of home helps assigned to PWAs (People With AIDS) and this was a source of particular anxiety for one MOer working in that role. She would, she said, be ‘forced’ to tend to these homes and also to enter a compact of secrecy. If she were called upon to ‘help AIDS victims when they are full-blown’ she would ‘not be allowed to tell anyone’, she wrote. She was angry that the liberal state, especially left

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<sup>55</sup> See, for example: MOA, AIDS, MOer B1156.

<sup>56</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B1891.

<sup>57</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer A1733.

<sup>58</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer D1974.

<sup>59</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B1220.

<sup>60</sup> For the putative distinctiveness of queer domesticities see: Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth Century London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), intro.



wing local councils, were complicit in preserving the ‘rights’ of a dubious and irresponsible minority at the expense of everyone else.<sup>61</sup>

*The gay menace*

Generalised anxiety, writes Ahmed, becomes fear when it fixes on an object.<sup>62</sup> In this case and in these testimonies that figure was most frequently the homosexual.

Although there is no mention of gays or homosexuals in the directive sent out by MO or indeed in the public health broadcast about which MOers were asked, almost all of them made the connection between ‘these people’ and AIDS and mark themselves out from such sorrowful villains or victims. Several MOers to felt new or renewed fear around gay men. One now greeted members of her opera group without a kiss.

Another ‘air kissed’ gay friends. For a 27-year-old research assistant observed that ‘when [my gay friend] kisses me on the mouth I don’t stop him because I feel the risk of offending him outweighs the chance of catching anything from him, but it does cross my mind’.<sup>63</sup> A 20-year-old student who had a gay flat mate told MO of his frustration at the way his friends ‘are forever going on about disinfecting the seat, and washing up very carefully, and having separate cutlery and mugs’.<sup>64</sup> A 61-year old retired civil servant who was ‘not homosexual and not multi-partnered’ wrote that he knew ‘several homosexuals’: ‘they look very fit but I no longer feel as easy in their

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<sup>61</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B78.

<sup>62</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

<sup>63</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer D1527.

<sup>64</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B1814.

company as I did. That's the honest truth.'<sup>65</sup> For several there was a sense of guilt at the discomfort they experienced around their gay friends and acquaintances.

A woman in her 40s (a 1960s teenager) believed it would be a mistake 'to swing back to the days when the more promiscuous or liberated amongst us had to be secretive', and yet 'admits to avoiding socialising with gays if I can whereas before it was something I accepted.' This was especially problematic for her given that she worked at the BBC which is 'full of gay employees' and where 'a researcher suffering from the illness was working very closely with other staff'.<sup>66</sup> The Corporation had itself issued a warning at the end of April 1987 (just before the release of the MO directive) that there was a 'slim' chance 'that razor blades used to splice recording tape in editing could transmit the AIDS virus'.<sup>67</sup>

Such workplace fears were legion. An architect interviewed for another study did 'not like to be near the sneezes of a gay workmate', although he knew this was not 'meant to be a risk'.<sup>68</sup> An industrial tribunal in 1987 meanwhile heard the case of a projectionist for Letchworth Palace cinema who had been dismissed after his colleagues refused to work with him because they thought they were at risk from HIV after his conviction for a cottaging (public sex) offence. The dismissal was upheld, though the decision was reversed in a subsequent Employment Appeal Tribunal.<sup>69</sup> Such everyday fear was underpinned by a suspicion about the information that was

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<sup>65</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer E1510.

<sup>66</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B787

<sup>67</sup> MOA, 'AIDS danger in razor blades', *The Star* (South Africa), 28.4.1987

<sup>68</sup> Nisbet and McQueen, "Anti-Permissive Attitudes," 897.

<sup>69</sup> Petra Wilson, "Discrimination in the Workplace: protection and the law in the UK" in Fitzsimons, Hardy, and Tolley, *Economic*, 315.

disseminated and a ‘nagging feeling’ (as one had it) that ‘we don’t know everything’.<sup>70</sup> This touches a broader tendency amongst MOers – right from the inception of the project in the 1937 - to be suspicious of the political elite and uncertain about ‘expert knowledge’.<sup>71</sup>

For heterosexuals there was some comfort to be had in rhetorically reinforcing the sexuality divide and minoritising those on the ‘other’ (and dangerous) side of it. Several MOers were ‘dismayed’ that changing sexual behaviour amongst gay men was not always in the direction of the monogamy many MOers experienced for themselves and wanted to see in others. What coverage of the AIDS crisis revealed about the sex lives of gay men ‘revolted’ some. A 67-year-old retired Citizen Advice Bureau worker wrote that: ‘ever since I spent a two week holiday in Gran Canaria with two gay friends and listened to their talk and saw how they spent their time in ceaseless sexual promiscuity, my feelings towards gay men have changed from affectionate if rather rueful tolerance in the direction of revulsion’.<sup>72</sup> A retired teacher from the West Midlands felt the ‘flood of anti-homosexual feeling’ was ‘intensified by the realisation of the promiscuity of homosexuals’.<sup>73</sup> This was not only (or even) about the virus and the risk of catching it. These emotions related to (homo)sex and (homo)sexuality – something we see in the euphemisms deployed: MOers frequent

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<sup>70</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer F1615.

<sup>71</sup> Pollen, “Research Methodology,” 221; Tulloch and Lupton, *Television AIDS and Risk*, chk; see also the broader findings on “Trust in the Establishment” in the British Social Attitudes survey conducted in 1987: Jowell, Witherspoon, and Brook, *BSAS*, 111.

<sup>72</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer D996.

<sup>73</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B668.

reference to ‘abhorrent’ and ‘disgusting’ acts bound act and emotion together. A divide was reinforced as the righteously disgusted encounter disgraceful others.<sup>74</sup> There was a chain of association here that played on heterosexual shame too – for women particularly. Those writing would certainly have been aware of the stigma that still clung unevenly to unplanned and pre-marital pregnancy.<sup>75</sup> Traces of that shame are perhaps evident here – displaced onto gay men and accompanied with a resentment of the sexual freedoms men seemed to enjoy, straight ‘young bucks’ included.<sup>76</sup> Sex was certainly cast in these MO testimonies as a problem and a risk; it was categorically not figured in terms of desire and pleasure. In NLGS (National Lesbian and Gay Survey) testimonies, meanwhile, these threads of danger and desire unevenly and uncomfortably knot together.

As requested by the directive, many MOers reported ‘jokes’. These tended to underscore the association of gay men with AIDS. The most commonly cited were the ‘amusing’ acronyms associated with GAY and AIDS (‘Got AIDS Yet’ and ‘Arse Injected Death Sentence’), but there were a smattering of others. One woman reported ‘a little gem [my husband] brought home the other day: Q: What do you call five homosexuals in the back of a van? A: The AIDS team’.<sup>77</sup> Another remarked on a local car bumper sticker in Wales: ‘Stamp out AIDS: run over a queer.’<sup>78</sup> Jokes, as Freud famously suggested, are underpinned and mobilised by deep-seated and unconscious

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<sup>74</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 94.

<sup>75</sup> Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England, 1918 – 1963* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp.149 – 161.

<sup>76</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer CHK

<sup>77</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer F1928.

<sup>78</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer F205

fears, concerns and preoccupations.<sup>79</sup> Dismissive jokes might mask fear, disgust, and perhaps also a certain fascination with sex acts associated with gay men but certainly not limited to them. Jokes thus served as a lightning rod for feelings in the context of the AIDS crisis and also deflected or obscured those emotions. What they signal too is the way in which AIDS had entered casual conversation. Those that did not report a joke at least had an anecdote about something someone they knew had said or done – and also how they felt about it. Such everyday interaction was often where an emotional tenor was set.

*For the sake of the children*

Most MOers were unconcerned about their own sex lives. They mention their marriages, lack of sex, monogamy or – in the case of one woman in her mid 70s – a recession in her husband’s philandering which allowed her to feel safe. She was also ‘very glad that her own sons are past the danger years when anything different might be something to experiment with’ - signalling a set assumptions about the young and about male behaviour which run through many of the testimonies.<sup>80</sup> Others were nevertheless anxious for those close to them. A 37-year old registrar was ‘fearful’, ‘terrified’ for her teenage children and was careful to make sure AIDS was discussed at home, and at one remove from the ‘lynch mob’ mentality.<sup>81</sup> A 50-year old teacher and peace campaigner from the South East, who struggled with her husband’s homophobia, was concerned that her son ‘won’t use condoms’ with his HIV negative

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<sup>79</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Pelican Freud Library, vol.6: Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, ed. James Strachey and Angela Richerds (S.l.: Penguin, 1976).

<sup>80</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B58.

<sup>81</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer A1641.

but heroin-using girlfriend.<sup>82</sup> A Scottish civil servant worried that her teenage children thought AIDS was ‘not relevant’ to them. Her son has ‘a different girlfriend every few weeks’ though they were not, he told her, ‘that type of girl’.<sup>83</sup> This lack of worry on her son’s part prompted her own anxiety. Many others voiced broader concern for ‘the younger generation’ who, it was assumed, were never careful enough. Their heterosexuality was little comfort since amongst MOers promiscuity was as often touted as a factor in transmission as homosexuality (though the two – as we have seen – were frequently bracketed).<sup>84</sup> When children and grandchildren entered the picture the worries intensified: their actual or imagined behaviour potentially linked or exposed them to those on the other side of the re-entrenched divide. .<sup>85</sup>

Emotions ran especially high amongst parents of gay men embattled on that other side. AIDS was mentioned surprisingly little in their letters to Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FFLAG) but the link of gays to AIDS and AIDS to death underpinned the emotional tumult they described. There was a recurrent description by parents (mothers especially) of experiencing grief in response to their child’s ‘coming out’. ‘Our youngest son told us he was gay,’ wrote one: ‘Our reaction was total shock [...] Our ignorance was abysmal [...] but the main thing we

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<sup>82</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer A1530.

<sup>83</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B1867.

<sup>84</sup> Judith Wilson Ross, “Ethics and the Language of AIDS” in Eric Juengst and Barbara Koenig, eds., *The Meaning of AIDS: Implications for Medical Science, Clinical Practice and Public Health Policy* (New York: Praegar, 1989), 33.

<sup>85</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B1156.

felt was bereavement.<sup>86</sup> Yet another women wrote that when she told her husband that their son was gay: ‘he reacted with such anger, so unlike him it was almost as if he wanted to lash out, then he went very quiet, unable to speak [...] We were grieving, yes! We were suffering a bereavement.’<sup>87</sup> Yet another recounted the stages of grief: ‘When the shock wore off I went through what I know now is the inevitable mourning period of Denial, Anger, Fear, Sorrow, Worry and Blame. I tried to talk him out of it, I shouted at him and I cried all over him for weeks’.<sup>88</sup> To describe the experience of finding out that your child was gay by way of the grieving process seems to have become an orthodoxy and was in letters sent by FFLAG members to newspaper editors, and in reading recommended by the organisation. These parents were grieving the ‘straight’ child they had lost and perhaps the grandchildren now no longer in prospect. They grieved their gay son’s social death and the actual death AIDS seemed to hold in store for him.

Several FFLAG parents – once through their grieving process – signal their support by aligning themselves with the emotional world of their children. In this way they re-imagine their own emotional communities. Whilst the parents of blasé heterosexual children felt anxiety on their behalf because they did not think they were suitably worried, these parents articulate emotional identification with their gay children in solidarity against discriminatory others. They cultivate pride as the reverse

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<sup>86</sup> Anonymised letter to FFLAG, Manchester City Library, 55262 G/FFLAG Box 1, folder 1987 – 1989.

<sup>87</sup> Anonymised letter to FFLAG, Manchester City Library, 55262 G/FFLAG Box 1, folder 1987 – 1989.

<sup>88</sup> Copy of letter from Northern Province Synod on Human Sexuality, Manchester City Library, 55260 G/FFLAG Box 3.

of the shame attached to their son's sexual identity and their own failure to raise a heterosexual. Letters are filled with self accusation and questions about what they had done wrong.<sup>89</sup> In pride there is an attempt to recoup that lost or compromised social capital. One FFLAG member described how she and her friend changed into "I love my gay son" t-shirts' on the train from Manchester to gay pride in London in 1992; she went on: 'it brought a lump to motherly throats to see 86,000 lesbians and gays, our children amongst them, able for just one day to celebrate their sexuality, out and proud. Freed for a few hours from isolation, prejudice, bigotry and hostility, to be for a little while the majority. If only every day could be so happy for them'.<sup>90</sup> The political fight against prejudice and minoritisation is articulated here through the particular status and pathos of being a 'mother'. She manages to suggest an empathetic connection to her son's emotional community whilst linking also to that of mothers and parents. Speaking 'as a mother' had more purchase than speaking 'as a gay man'.

For other parents that move towards pride felt impossible. Some learnt that their sons were gay and that they were dead or dying at the same time, and entered a closeted world. There was perhaps some sense of shame at what the disease revealed about their son and his intimate life. There was also perhaps an associated desire to protect his legacy and perhaps themselves from the judgements of others. In his description of the funeral of his friend Bruno, Simon Watney eloquently described the trauma for Bruno's parents who felt 'condemned to silence, to euphemism ... in this the most devastating moment of their lives as parents'. The impulse was to secrecy

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<sup>89</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 107.

<sup>90</sup> Draft letter to the press from FFLAG, Manchester City Library, 55262 G/FFLAG Box 1.



and to close in, even amongst mourners united in grief. There was a stark difference between the sense of silenced shame which clung to this suburban funeral and the Bruno Watney had known in the city ‘as a magnificently affirmative and life-enhancing gay man.’ The disjunction, he wrote, ‘was all but unbearable’.<sup>91</sup> Like variations in risk, emotions were also mapped: shame, pleasure, pride, and fear became associated with and were anticipated in particular places and in relation to the people who gathered there.

This drive to protect children emerged rather differently when they were assumed not to be gay. The threat to such children was not only from HIV and AIDS but, as Thatcher also suggested, from gays and the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality. A 66-year-old community worker from Wales described how her gay friend (who ‘has had a long lasting stable relationship with his friend’ – a significant caveat given perceptions of risk) had been removed from a driving rota of the school mini bus company run by his family ‘just in case the children are at risk, whether from AIDS or homosexuality he is not sure’.<sup>92</sup> At the start of this piece MOer A1108 described how an office worker gave his children as the reason for ostracising his colleague. Meanwhile a campaign against the construction of the Lighthouse hospice and respite centre in Ladbroke Grove in London hinged on the proximity of a primary school to the site. Angry parents proposed a school strike if the centre went ahead - ironically in an area strongly associated with gay counterculture in the 1970s and queer countercultural cross-over before that.<sup>93</sup> Children were placed in the emotional vanguard – totems for the future and symbols of innocence potentially corrupted by

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<sup>91</sup> Watney, *Policing Desire*, p.7.

<sup>92</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer 1560.

<sup>93</sup> Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, chap. 5.

the very proximity of gay men. An NLGS correspondent displayed his own anger at this. Mothers with kids were, he said, ‘raving madly on about the fence not being high enough and that people with AIDS will walk past the school’. ‘Some local neo-fascist pig’ was meanwhile ‘ranting about gays [being at] the meeting [to discuss the hospice]’.<sup>94</sup> Here mothers ‘rave’ and ‘neo-fascist pig[s]’ ‘rant’; emotions throughout these materials are deeply gendered.

The anxiety that surrounded gay contact with children found voice in relation to several contemporary scandals and resonated with 1950s concern about ‘dangerous’, ‘predatory’ homosexuals who might infect or corrupt boys and young men they encountered. The case of Tory MP Harvey Proctor, who had had sex with underage male prostitutes (aged 17 – 21), came to court just as the MO directive was released in 1987. Custody cases involving gay dads rearticulated the purported danger to children in their care (something sections of the press were keen to underline).<sup>95</sup> There was also wider intensifying concern about the sexual dangers children faced. Between January and July 1987 121 children were taken away from their parents by Cleveland social services based on the children’s testimony and contested physical evidence. Parents vociferously denied the charges while the media and political debate revolved around the rights of parents over their children on the one hand, and on the other, the power of the state to intervene.<sup>96</sup> There was a suspicion that ‘politically correct’ and left wing social workers were being over

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<sup>94</sup> NLGS: respondent 236, box 5.

<sup>95</sup> Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 133

<sup>96</sup> Though 94 of the children were returned to their families after the outcry, subsequent investigations suggested that 70% of the abuse diagnoses had been correct.

zealous in this case whilst being lax in their acceptance of gay foster carers. Without any explanation one MOer devoted almost her entire testimony in response to the AIDS directive to events in Cleveland – a conflation of issues that was not, I’d suggest, incidental.<sup>97</sup>

### *Gay pride and shame*

What MOers and public commentators tended to overlook were the deeply felt emotions mediating the everyday intimate lives of gay men at this time. Two gay men in their mid twenties writing to the NLGS each described the ways in which the conflation of gay and AIDS played out for them. ‘AIDS has simply always been there’, wrote one, a student from Southampton. ‘If someone was gay it was assumed that he had AIDS and vice versa. Not a very positive start’.<sup>98</sup> ‘I suppose I was 12 when HIV came to my attention as the great gay plague,’ wrote the other. ‘I was terribly misinformed about it and assumed that I would die if I had sex with another man.’<sup>99</sup> A 65-year-old retired university lecturer found his relationship ‘badly effected by my partner’s extreme caution about AIDS’.<sup>100</sup> A 37-year-old London based engineer found ‘potential relationships fell apart’ ‘because of my [sexual] nervousness’ after two friends were diagnosed HIV positive.<sup>101</sup> ‘The AIDS crisis instantly horrified me,’ wrote a 32-year-old from Hampshire. ‘[I] did not change my behaviour overnight [...] until one night I imagined the virus replicating in my body

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<sup>97</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer D1772.

<sup>98</sup> NLGS, The Keep Record Office, Brighton; respondent 462, box 5.

<sup>99</sup> NLGS: respondent 436, box 5.

<sup>100</sup> NLGS: respondent 375, box 4.

<sup>101</sup> NLGS: respondent 377, box 4.

as I lay in bed and became convinced that it was only a matter of time before symptoms began to appear [...] [It] effected my ambitions and self confidence. I no longer wanted to take career risks'.<sup>102</sup> There is a visceral connection here between this man's experience of his body and the way he then interacted with the world beyond. A barman of a similar age had safer sex with his HIV positive partner. His doctor had tried to persuade him to leave 'for his own safety. But by this time I was hopelessly in love'.<sup>103</sup> Another NLGS contributor, a student in London in his 20s, described his uncertainty about whether he should ask his lover from San Francisco to test for HIV. He was trying to balance 'good sense' with the exigencies of love, desire and the fear of loss - loss of this potential lover should he reject him at the request to test or subsequent loss of his own life and/or that of his lover were they both to be HIV positive. He went on:

Even safe sex is no guarantee against infection. In a way I'm reconciled to dying at an early age. I don't plan for it, but I acknowledge it's a very real possibility. But that was so even before AIDS and my coming out. I'm afraid it's a cynicism about living with an unhappy childhood, the permanent threat of war, and self doubt. If I loved someone enough, I could bear to know it might kill me.<sup>104</sup>

This man again makes the link to war and the broader sense of risk – but if these were conjunctions felt strongly in the 1980s, he also suggests that there were continuities with how he and others felt before that time. Another NLGS correspondent – a London accountant – had been 'depressed and closeted' in the early 1980s. This, he

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<sup>102</sup> NLGS: respondent 461: box 5.

<sup>103</sup> NLGS: respondent 283: box 2.

<sup>104</sup> NLGS: respondent 220: box 2.

said, had ‘done him a favour’ because it meant he had avoided sexual contact with other men before and in the early stages of the AIDS crisis.<sup>105</sup>

This miasma of ‘negative’ emotion could be hard to side-step. For one NLGS correspondent the 1980s were ‘very frightening’ and isolating.<sup>106</sup> The MOer who founded NLGS, wrote of his own HIV diagnosis: ‘only one or two friends know. I did go along to a disco organised by Body Positive [in London]. I opened up to a stranger and had a good cry which was beneficial’, he said.<sup>107</sup> There is a palpable loneliness in this testimony, as there is in that of a theatre director from Northamptonshire who wrote to the NLGS of his depression at losing his partner to an AIDS related illness and who was now caring for his alcoholic mother.<sup>108</sup> A man who lost several friends from a squatting community he had been part of in Brixton explained to me in interview how ‘we [gay men] couldn’t mourn properly because we weren’t real people; we weren’t a real population; we didn’t have the right to have those rituals’.<sup>109</sup> Ahmed and Cvetkovich both observe how gay lives were seen to matter less and were consequently less worth grieving – a message this interviewee had internalised.<sup>110</sup> He saw his subsequent turn to psychotherapy as a profession as one of the emotional legacies of living through this most acute phase of the AIDS crisis. The scale of loss

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<sup>105</sup> NLGS: respondent 432: box 5.

<sup>106</sup> NLGS: respondent 377, box 4.

<sup>107</sup> MOA, AIDS, MOer B1106.

<sup>108</sup> NLGS: Respondent 467: box 5.

<sup>109</sup> Cook interview with “Stephen”, 2008. I discuss this interview further in: Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 224.

<sup>110</sup> On this piece see: Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*; Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 5.

could lead to a sense of emotional compression or of overload. Derek Jarman – perhaps the most eloquent chronicler of the UK epidemic - caught something of this in his description of meeting a young film-maker:

He pulled me over and said, ‘Derek, please help me. The doctor told me I have six months to live. I’ve been walking the streets ever since. I haven’t been home. I don’t know what to do. Can you help me tell my lover and parents?’ I spent an anguished night with him making telephone calls. Eventually, after I had taken him home, I walked back across London in a cold dawn. Slowly but surely every conversation and every encounter was stalked by the shadow of the virus; a terrible impotence overwhelmed us – there was nothing to do.<sup>111</sup>

We witness in these testimonies the emotional imperatives behind choices and behaviour, the impact of fear and perhaps guilt and shame on relationships, and the emotional legacy of the way queer men had been socially and culturally positioned before AIDS arrived. Several referred to previous sexual activity which continued to worry them in this new era. A Nigerian man living in London was ‘as safe’ as he could be but was ‘worried sick’ about sex he had as a teenager with a man who subsequently died’.<sup>112</sup> Their words tug at presumptions on the part of MOers and others that gay men were irresponsible.<sup>113</sup> Rates of infection for other sexually transmitted infections declined ‘massively’ amongst gay men over the 1980s

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<sup>111</sup> Derek Jarman, *At Your Own Risk: A Saint’s Testament* (London: Hutchinson, 1992), 115.

<sup>112</sup> NLGS, respondent 407: box 4.

<sup>113</sup> Nisbet and McQueen, “Anti-Permissive Attitudes,” 897.

suggesting significant changes to sexual behaviour.<sup>114</sup> Knowledge of risk, belonging to an emotional constituency braced by fear and grief, and being on the receiving end of concerted and directed safer sex promotion were each possible factors in such change. Beyond the emotional intensity of gay community at the time there seems to have been less felt imperative to be cautious or to act with care and solidarity. There might also have been an emotionally charged and gendered attachment to sex which was not inhibited or by condoms.<sup>115</sup> A meeting between the Independent Broadcasting Association and health professionals discussed this apparent resistance to changing sexual practices amongst ‘bisexual’ and ‘promiscuous [heterosexual] men’ and at how that might be addressed in TV coverage. ‘Fear’ was listed alongside ‘ignorance’, ‘selfishness’ and ‘extreme pig-headedness’ as key factors in the refusal of condoms by such men.<sup>116</sup> For them denial was perhaps easier than active risk avoidance - especially as they did not have a tangible community affirming safer sex (possibly the reverse in fact). ‘Responsible’ gays and ‘reasonable’ health professionals were meanwhile here constituting themselves partly in opposition and claiming some legitimacy by behaving well.<sup>117</sup>

If anti-gay abuse was hardly new there was now a fresh invective behind it – as MOer A1108 found at Heathrow and as many others reported too.<sup>118</sup> This could

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<sup>114</sup> Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, 383.

<sup>115</sup> Report on ‘HEC [Health Education Council] Workshop’ IBA Archive.

<sup>116</sup> Report on ‘HEC [Health Education Council] Workshop’ IBA Archive.

<sup>117</sup> For more on the impulse for gay men to behave well see especially: Deborah Gould, “The Shame of Gay Pride in Early AIDS Activism” in Halperin and Traub, *Gay Shame*.

<sup>118</sup> Cook, *A Gay History of Britain*, chap. 6.

lead to intense feelings of vulnerability for gay men, in particular those with AIDS diagnosis and visible signs of AIDS-related conditions like the rare skin cancer karposi sarcoma (KS). London Lighthouse introduced make-up camouflage workshops to teach men how to cover their lesions up; self-consciousness and shame often accompanied such bodily changes. Several MOers recalled the shocking death of Rock Hudson in 1985. The *Daily Mail*, then as now one of Britain's most salacious and cruel dailies, reported in a banner headline that Hudson had 'died a living skeleton – and so ashamed'.<sup>119</sup> The paper deftly displaced and justified its judgement by suggesting that this is what Hudson felt himself. Accompanying the piece were before and after pictures marking the actor's physical but also moral decline – his sins, like a latter day Dorian Gray, apparently written on his body.

Gay men tended to assume indifference or condemnation on the part of others. This, however, belied the more nuanced range of emotions and opinions that emerge in MOer testimonies and other research projects. Empathy was mobilised by some against the tide of anger and disgust. 'My greatest emotion is purely for those suffering and who are ostracised by friends and workmates', wrote a 40-year-old artist and mother of three, for example.<sup>120</sup> Gill Green found in her 1988 – 1989 work on AIDS stigma that her HIV positive interviewees assumed that her parallel cohort of HIV negative interviewees would articulate more disdain than they in fact did. Her HIV positive sample had 'an exaggerated view of the hostility' of 'generalised others', she concluded. In this way, she identified a difference between 'enacted' and 'felt' stigma, that is between directly experienced negative reaction and negativity that was anticipated or presumed - and which could be equally debilitating. The headline

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<sup>119</sup> *Daily Mail*, 3.10.1985

<sup>120</sup> AIDS, MOer 1706.



(literally when we look at the mainstream press) prejudice at this point did not necessarily translate straightforwardly into the way straight and HIV negative people thought, felt and behaved. This is true of MOers too, highlighting the potential for shifts in thinking and cross-cutting emotional communities. Apparent normalcy and respectability, Ken Plummer reminds us, often mask eccentric behaviours and desires which can foster unexpected displays of empathy.<sup>121</sup> Broad-brush presumptions about gay and straight communities of feeling break down in this analysis. These presumptions were nevertheless powerful and effected gay men in their everyday lives.

Others have argued powerfully that such perceived and actual emotive judgements have fundamentally shaped gay identity and community.<sup>122</sup> Men might take on the shame and inferiority others heaped upon them; they might also deliberately thwart expectation by finding ways in the margins, in some of those ‘pretended families’ perhaps, of feeling differently. Thus, though I have noted an emotional turning inwards on the part of some gay men and their families and friends in the context of the epidemic, this was, firstly, not inevitable and, secondly, not always towards loneliness and despair. The effect of cultural shaming could provide an impulse in other directions – towards pride most obviously, but also pleasure and even euphoria, especially in the burgeoning 1980s clubbing and associated recreational drug scene. Here was a different emotional community orientated around particular places which were both an escape from and a defiant refusal of domineering

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<sup>121</sup> Ken Plummer, “Generational Sexualities, Subterranean Traditions, and the Hauntings of the Sexual World: Some Preliminary Remarks,” *Symbolic Interaction* 33, no. 2 (April 1, 2010): 163–90.

<sup>122</sup> See especially essays in: Halperin and Traub, *Gay Shame*.

judgements. ‘Affirmation,’ Ahmed suggests, might not come through the conversion of shame into pride, but the ‘enjoyment of that which has been designated shameful by normative culture’.<sup>123</sup> Modes of endurance and survival might come through what Douglas Crimp describes as ‘collectivities of the shamed’.<sup>124</sup>

As the decade progressed, communities were consolidated as gay men, lesbians and their allies ‘performed’ what Judith Stacey describes as ‘Herculean levels of caretaking outside default family form’.<sup>125</sup> They also began – from roughly this time – to direct anger and grief more fiercely towards pride in a potent combination of ‘mourning and militancy’.<sup>126</sup> This, argues sociologist Peter Aggleton, was a more persuasive strategy in combatting stigma and shifting the parameters of debate. If apology, discretion and pseudo respectability had been significant strategies for survival and uneasy social acceptance to date, these approaches were seen by some to be ineffective and implausible as AIDS diagnoses forced more gay men out of well-maintained closets and gay sex lives were exposed to broader scrutiny and comment. There was in this context a rearticulation of Gay Liberation arguments from the early 1970s about proud sexual difference and visibility, and a more strident challenge to the moral and political status quo and the modes of emoting that shaped and sustained

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<sup>123</sup> Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 146.

<sup>124</sup> Halperin and Traub, *Gay Shame*, 23.

<sup>125</sup> J. Stacey, “The Families of Man: Gay Male Intimacy and Kinship in a Global Metropolis,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, no. 3 (2005): 1914.

<sup>126</sup> Douglas Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy,” *October* 51 (1989): 3–18; Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), chap. 5; Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 156.

it.<sup>127</sup> ‘The injustices are too innumerable to mention and having lost one friend due to AIDS I am angry. Media grabbing direct action is one of the few powerful courses of action left open to society’s discontents’, wrote one NLGS correspondent, a librarian from Brighton.<sup>128</sup> A 32-year-old civil servant signalled the way ACT UP in America offered a model of activism to gays in the UK. ‘If we have learnt anything from our American brothers it is the necessity to stop being apathetic’, he wrote.<sup>129</sup> The sense of brotherhood - reaching across the Atlantic – is striking. This can yet obscure some of the contextual particularities which relate to different emotional regimes and activist imperatives. In the UK, for example, the National Health Service meant health battles were less intense than in the US. Clause 28 meanwhile provided a different focus for lesbian and gay anger and activism. Some NLGS contributors sensed a different moral climate between the two nations. An NLGS correspondent from Cumbria felt that the ‘British do not have the same zest for moral righteousness as the Americans’.<sup>130</sup> Another, ‘a lifelong conservative’, saw ACT-UP as an American import which ‘was not representative of the majority of level headed gay guys’. Here again the tacit contrast between the supposedly rational (‘level headed’) British and the more extreme American emotional modus operandi. The adoption of these apparently foreign activist tactics made this man feel ‘more vulnerable ...than in the

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<sup>127</sup> Richard Parker and Peter Aggleton, “HIV and AIDS-Related Stigma and Discrimination: A Conceptual Framework and Implications for Action,” *Social Science & Medicine* 57, no. 1 (July 2003): 13–24.

<sup>128</sup> NLGS: respondent 430, box 5.

<sup>129</sup> NLGS: respondent 395, box 4.

<sup>130</sup> NLGS, respondent 184, box 1.

1950s and 1960s'.<sup>131</sup> His testimony is a reminder that age and generation (amongst many other cross cutting identifications) might qualify the feelings it felt possible to have and to express at particular moments. The emotional habitus of this man's earlier life was folded into his present in ways that made it difficult for him to feel connected to the new emotional tenor and community he was encountering amongst gay men in the late 1980s. It was, he said, 'out of step' with his sense of himself and his sense of homosexuality. The vulnerability this man describes and the shame and loneliness owned in other NLGS testimonies complicated the growing stridency of the later 1980s. Gay men were encouraged to frame, experience and selectively represent emotion in particular ways and yet the anger and pride many displayed publicly seems often to have been part of an emotional juggling act which included various related but more negatively and privately felt affects.

*Conclusions: traces and legacies*

Historians of the queer past have looked in detail at the social and cultural experience of gay men in the context of this crisis. They have – for understandable reasons - paid less attention to the nuances of the 'normal' or 'heterosexual' response. Yet if we are trying to capture the emotional dynamics that underpin experiences of the crisis we cannot ignore it. Mass Observation helps. We can see more clearly than with other sources the everyday concerns of 'normal' people, the contexts in which articulated and felt emotions played out, and the ways in which they were nurtured and challenged. We see emotions mobilised differently depending on where the person was standing in relation to the crisis and who they were communicating with. Especially when we take MO in oblique conversation with NLGS and other sources

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<sup>131</sup> NLGS: respondent 395, box 4.

and archives, emotional communities also come into focus and we find an emotional charge attending particular groups and individuals – children, mothers, gay men, for example.

The press, TV, ministerial and prime ministerial pronouncements and daily interactions between family, friends and workmates honed emotional styles and set off particular emotional dynamics in relation to AIDS, HIV and by close association in the UK context, gay men.<sup>132</sup> These styles and dynamics prompted and also legitimised certain government acts and actions (Clause 28 not least). Individuals could feel justified in the everyday exclusions or even abuse they were party to in part because of the prevailing emotional climate. Others were prompted to fierce opposition and protest because of the raw anger and hate they were faced with or witnessed. Alongside, and again in partial reaction, health professionals and community organisations saw the particular importance of developing approaches and policies which could provide sustained and compassionate support and care for those living with HIV and AIDS, and those ill and dying. Prevailing emotional communities and styles had considerable power, and yet in many people moved against them because of cross cutting affections, affiliations and solidarities. Individuals might belong simultaneously to different emotional communities and feel a tension as they overlapped or as they moved between them.

The emotive language that circled the crisis around 1987 is of course identifiable before - we see it developing across the preceding years. It is also familiar from earlier renditions of the homosexual, venereal disease, and the outsider much earlier years. In its wider articulation around 1986 and 1987 this language perhaps

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<sup>132</sup> Horst Stipp and Dennis Kerr, “Determinants of Public Opinion About AIDS,”

*Public Opinion Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (March 20, 1989): 98–106.

caused particular fear and pain - and also set certain tones and underpinned certain reactions in the years that followed and as deaths and diagnoses escalated – from the total of 610 at the end of 1987 to a total of 12,105 by 1996, the year anti retroviral drugs began to transform treatment and prognoses. Bulging files on the AIDS crisis at Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive show that sections of the press continued to pedal fear and loathing in these later years. There was a rise in reports of murder, attack and abuse of gay men.<sup>133</sup> Alongside pride and protest grew alongside and a mass lesbian and gay movement got underway – in part prompted by and also then ameliorating that sense of containment, isolation, and shame some felt. Following the ‘wartime emergency’ years of 1986 and 1987, Virginia Berridge identifies a professionalization and normalisation in medical and government response to the epidemic as hospitalisation and deaths became more and more frequent and tragically routine.

The emotional heat did abate. Public opinion began to shift - especially after the treatment breakthroughs of 1996. When MO asked its panel about gays in the family in 2001 we find that most were markedly more relaxed than they had been in 1987. Whilst 74% of people surveyed by The British Social Attitudes Survey thought ‘homosexual relations’ were ‘always’ or ‘mostly’ wrong in 1987 (up from 62% in 1983) in 2000 only 46% agreed.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Cook, *A Gay History of Britain*, ch.6.

<sup>134</sup> The figure fell further over the following decade – to 30% in 2010.

“Homosexuality”, British Social Attitudes (online)

<http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/latest-report/british-social-attitudes-30/personal-relationships/homosexuality.aspx> (accessed: 25.11.2016).

The emotional styles woven around and directing such opinion had shifted - albeit unevenly. Legal changes in adoption (2002), civil partnership (2004) and marriage (2014) folded gay men and lesbians – for better or worse - into more legitimised emotional communities and associated rituals. There was yet a continuing whiff of the sentiments I have discussed in relation to 1987, albeit masked by calmer demeanours. The UK’s Stigma Project found that of its sample of 283 HIV people 54% had been verbally assaulted, harassed or threatened – in part, they believed, because of their HIV status. 44% felt ashamed of that status; 43% felt guilty about it. 25% had felt suicidal in the last year.<sup>135</sup> Given the effectiveness of treatment such feelings could cause more harm and pain than the virus itself.

These feelings, Sarah Ahmed observes, are ‘sticky’ and hard to dispel even in rather changed contexts.<sup>136</sup> This is because they relate to some long and tortured histories - histories which I have traced in particular through sexuality and sexual politics, but in which histories of race, class, religion and gender are also at stake. Emotional communities and styles shift and change, but they also carry with them shades of earlier emotional regimes and gestures. As Sarah Shulman writes in relation to the AIDS crisis in New York that ‘the experiencing, the remembering, the hiding, the overcoming [...] leave their scars.’ ‘AIDS is not over’, she reminds us, ‘and neither is AIDS in the past’.<sup>137</sup> Jimmy Somerville’s past is – as he indicated in his recent *Independent* interview - recurrent in his everyday.

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<sup>135</sup> ‘Give Stigma the Finger’, Stigma Index Report 2009

[http://www.stigmaindex.org/sites/default/files/reports/Give\\_stigma\\_the\\_index\\_finger-%20UK%20initial%20finding%202009.pdf](http://www.stigmaindex.org/sites/default/files/reports/Give_stigma_the_index_finger-%20UK%20initial%20finding%202009.pdf) (accessed 10.11.2016).

<sup>136</sup> Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 92

The archives I worked through are emotionally laden. Here were intimacies shared by people I did not know brought into the accessible space of the archives – blurring (as Cvetkovich suggests) those much touted lines between public and domestic, between internal and external experience, between subjectivity and society. Emotions, I was reminded repeatedly, were and are mobilised and experienced across such lines and yet were also insistently produced as private and irrational and so as somehow less significant than the rationality associated with governance.

The emotion I felt within these collections was certainly to do with this particular material I was looking at and the events, losses, cruelties and unkindnesses it documented. My emotion was also to do with my own memories of and also some nostalgia for that time. But it was I think exacerbated by the context in which I was doing this research and what I was reading in the papers as I travelled to and from these archives. Judith Butler wrote that 2016 saw ‘the emancipation of unbridled hatred’ against those who apparently threaten our values, our economy, our bodies and ourselves.<sup>138</sup> Reported hate crime in the UK increased markedly – by around 16% - after the vote to leave the European Union in June 2016 – including a particular spike in homophobic abuse and assault.<sup>139</sup> Earlier I cited one line from Walter Benjamin’s 1940 ‘Thesis on the Philosophy of History’. Let me add another. He wrote that ‘to articulate the past historically means to seize hold of a memory as it

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<sup>138</sup> ‘Trump is emancipating unbridled hatred’, Judith Butler interview with Rina Soloveitchik, *Ziet Online* (28.10.2016). <http://www.zeit.de/kultur/2016-10/judith-butler-donald-trump-populism-interview> (accessed 11.11.2016).

<sup>139</sup> ‘Lasting Rise in Hate Crime After EU Referendum, figures show’, *The Guardian online* (7.9.2016) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/sep/07/hate-surged-after-eu-referendum-police-figures-show> (accessed 11.11.2016)



flashes up at moments of danger'.<sup>140</sup> To return to one moment of danger, to try to grasp its emotional complexity, might allow us to see more clearly the dangers which threaten us now and suggest something of our need for vigilance and our capacity to resist and respond.

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<sup>140</sup> Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'.