

# **SENSIBLE POLITICS**

**THE VISUAL CULTURE OF NONGOVERNMENTAL ACTIVISM**

Edited by

Meg McLagan and Yates McKee

**ZONE BOOKS • NEW YORK**

2012

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1226 Prospect Avenue  
Brooklyn, NY 11218

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Printed in the United States of America.

Distributed by The MIT Press,  
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sensible politics : the visual culture of nongovernmental activism  
/ edited by Meg McLagan and Yates McKee.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-935408-24-6 (alk. paper)

1. Arts—Political aspects. 2. Visual communication—  
Political aspects. 3. Non-governmental organizations—Political  
activity. 4. Politics and culture. I. McLagan, Meg, editor.  
II. McKee, Yates, editor.

NX186.P64545 2012  
700.1'03—dc23

2012004106

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## Sex in an Epidemic as AIDS Archive Activism: An Interview with Jean Carlomusto

Ann Cvetkovich

As a longtime AIDS activist and mediamaker, Jean Carlomusto has been at the forefront of a movement noted for its innovative use of video as an integral part of activism. Cultural theorist and ACT UP member Douglas Crimp has used the term “cultural activism” to describe the video camera’s ubiquitous presence at demonstrations, as well as the sophisticated use of graphic design and print culture by AIDS activists.<sup>1</sup> Carlomusto was a member of the Testing the Limits and DIVA-TV video collectives, which used newly available video technologies not only to document and more widely publicize direct action, but to create new forms of media activism by extending the life of a demonstration and its messages.<sup>2</sup> *Testing the Limits: NYC* (1987) documented early responses to AIDS activism as well as the formation of ACT UP in 1987. DIVA-TV, a collective affiliated with ACT UP, produced videos about key ACT UP actions, including *Target City Hail* (1989) and *Stop the Church* (1990), which served to publicize and promote the tactics of direct action. Carlomusto also worked at Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC), where she and Gregg Bordowitz produced the *Living With AIDS* cable television series, which made cultural production integral to providing health care and social services. GMHC’s *Safer Sex Shorts* (1989), for example, presented safe sex in openly erotic ways that embraced pornography, S/M, and cruising. Another GMHC video, *Doctors, Liars, and Women* (1988), showcased Carlomusto’s work with the ACT UP Women’s Caucus by focusing on their demonstration against *Cosmopolitan* magazine for its claim that women are not at risk for AIDS through heterosexual intercourse.

Jean Carlomusto’s most recent video, *Sex in an Epidemic* (2010) (with Shanti Avirgan as associate producer), draws quite literally on her longtime career as an AIDS media activist by reusing footage from this archive in order to keep it alive and sustain its meanings.<sup>3</sup> Using a personal archive of tapes she made for *Testing the Limits*, DIVA-TV, and GMHC (as well as from other sources such as the Lesbian Herstory



HIV Prevention Justice Alliance Rally, National HIV Prevention Conference, Atlanta, Georgia 2007. From Jean Carlomusto, *Sex in an Epidemic* (2010).

Archives collection of tapes by the video activist group the Love Collective), Carlomusto revisits early responses to the AIDS crisis in the gay male community that led to the invention of safer sex and to a remarkable AIDS activist movement in order to claim this history as central to understanding contemporary sexual politics. Especially compelling is the reminder of how frightening and devastating the early years of the health crisis were, when people were dying with no idea why and with no information about how to halt the transmission of what had not yet even been named as a virus. Carlomusto also uses the retrospective power of archival documentary to provide a broad context for this moment and to link past and present. She situates the history of safer sex in relation to the post-World War II sexual revolution in the United States and the feminist reproductive rights movement, connects the early AIDS crisis to debates over sex education and abstinence-only policies during the Clinton and Bush administrations, and explores the legacies of AIDS activism in contemporary struggles over HIV/AIDS prevention that are now global in scope. She seeks to make the history of queer sexual activism central to a politics of prevention, justice that remains relevant now not only in the battle against HIV/AIDS, but in efforts to create more honest and open sexual cultures. In addition to making more visible a history that is in danger of being forgotten, she articulates a vision of a queer sexual politics in which public sex education could continue to benefit from the insights of early AIDS activism. *Sex in An Epidemic* also has a memorial function, preserving the images and the work of those who struggled to create safer sex; to this end, Carlomusto uses footage she taped for GMHC's oral history project, which includes interviews with key GMHC leaders that are especially valuable, because many of them have since died. Carlomusto's emotional investment in the archival footage contributes to its political and historical value.

Less to be expected, perhaps, is that *Sex in an Epidemic* also shows the influence of the more personal body of work that Carlomusto has produced alongside of and in dialogue with her activist media, including *L Is for the Way You Look* (1990), about lesbian visibility, *To Catch a Glimpse* (1997), about the secret of her grandmother's death from a botched abortion, *Shatzi Is Dying* (2000), about the death of her dog and burnout from AIDS activism, and *Monte Cassino* (2003), about her Italian father's experience of bombing in Italy during World War II.<sup>4</sup> This autoethnographic work manifests a queer commitment to the historical significance of personal experience, and Carlomusto often uses both personal and public archives in the videos, incorporating material such as family photographs because it is emotionally meaningful. The influence of Carlomusto's more personal work is present in *Sex in an Epidemic's* efforts to keep the history of AIDS activism alive, not just as a fading or distant memory, but as a vital resource, by reusing and recirculating its substantial documentary archive. She practices a version of what

Alex Juhasz has called "queer archive activism," creating a new generation of AIDS media activism by recontextualizing and reviving earlier media.<sup>5</sup>

Our conversation, which took place on June 25, 2009 and is transcribed here, underscores *Sex in an Epidemic's* argument that people having sex and then talking about it in public constitutes a form of nongovernmental politics. As a lesbian and a feminist with a pro-sex sensibility, Carlomusto describes the powerful appeal of gay male sex cultures that are open about sexuality. At the heart of *Sex in an Epidemic* is the insistence that this early moment remains relevant, that we have not yet learned how to grapple with the challenges that were faced by gay men encountering not only an epidemic, but homophobia and fear of sex, and who drew on intimate experience and semipublic sexual networks to figure out what to do in the absence of any publicly available information. Men such as Richard Berkowitz, one of the early advocates of how to have sex in an epidemic, were hustlers and club goers who figured out that there is lots of sexual activity that is not dangerous sex, and that promiscuity and sex are not the same thing. (In 1983, Berkowitz coauthored with Michael Callen and Joseph Sonnabend the pamphlet *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic* that provides crucial inspiration for Carlomusto.) *Sex in an Epidemic* chronicles the grassroots efforts through which they were able to take this message to others, forging a cultural activism in which pornography met social work in support groups where men could reclaim sex at a time when it seemed to be taken away from them. They used forms of cultural activism—safer-sex comics, film screenings, and media that Carlomusto herself produced—in order to make a public culture out of the knowledge derived from their intimate lives. Carlomusto uses the documentary history of *Sex in an Epidemic* to suggest that these lessons created by gay men in stigmatized and vulnerable social positions remain relevant to the present, when ordinary people continue to make significant interventions to change people's daily sexual practices. She creates a queer version of what sexual knowledge and education might look like.

A key concept promoted by Carlomusto in the video is prevention justice, the rallying cry of CHAMP (Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project), one of the organizations influenced by ACT UP that Carlomusto documents in the closing section of *Sex in an Epidemic*. "Prevention justice" is a broad term for the complex systemic changes required fully to address and eliminate AIDS, including a politics of safer sex that acknowledges the messiness of sex, rather than trying to eradicate it, and that continues to find ways to create media that are sexy and affectively meaningful. CHAMP shows the influence not only of AIDS activism of the late 1980s and early 1990s, but also of the global AIDS activist movement of 2000 and beyond, which was catalyzed by the World AIDS Conference in Durban in 2000 and the United Nations Special Session on HIV/AIDS in 2001, both of which

inspired new transnational coalitions dedicated to making treatment for HIV/AIDS and health care available across global economic divides.<sup>5</sup> At a 2007 demonstration in Atlanta, CHAMP held up puzzle pieces that named the interlocking elements of a program for HIV/AIDS prevention, including free condoms, syringe exchange, racial justice, housing for all, equity for women, drug policy reform, economic justice, honest sex ed, prevention in prisons, valuing LGBT lives, health care for all, a national AIDS strategy, research, harm reduction, and immigration rights. *Sex in an Epidemic* performs the important work of remembering a lineage of queer AIDS activist work that aims to destigmatize sex and that continues to have relevance now, even as it must be transformed by work in a range of different communities, including people of color, prisoners, and those outside the U.S.

I was delighted to interview Carlomusto in order to let her speak for herself, just as she has enabled others to speak and be witnesses and in order to create another form of activist archive. Presenting Carlomusto's newest work in this format also seemed especially appropriate because it was an opportunity to follow up on my previous interviews with her as part of an oral history project on lesbians in ACT UP. In that earlier project, I wanted to create an archive of lesbian participation in ACT UP so as to prevent the loss of that history, and I also wanted to suggest the ongoing legacies of activism by asking Carlomusto and others how their work and lives continued to be affected by their involvement in AIDS activism into the following decade. The genre of the interview allowed me to explore the personal and affective investments in activism that might not be apparent in more public forums, such as demonstrations and documentary media. Interviewing Carlomusto about *Sex in an Epidemic* provided an opportunity to continue that conversation by exploring how she continues to make use of AIDS activist media some twenty years after some of the footage was originally filmed, not only in order to make history, but in order to make new activist interventions.

ANN CVETKOVICH: Why did you want to make *Sex in an Epidemic* [SE], and how does it emerge from your history as an AIDS media activist?

JEAN CARLOMUSTO: I always wanted to do a piece about the early safer-sex movement. In 1986, I started volunteering for GMHC [Gay Men's Health Crisis]. I was the projectionist for *Chance of a Lifetime*, an early safer-sex video produced by Ray Jacobs in 1985 for GMHC, which eroticized safer sex and drew on pornography for inspiration. I had so much fun projecting the film for weekend workshops in the auditorium of the High School for the Humanities, where the projector screen felt like a locus of all the sexual fear, anxiety, and hope of the moment. People were

talking about sex, and in a very loving way. They were saying we can do this, this isn't going to end our sex lives, we can still be sexual, we just have to think about ourselves and each other. We have to talk about sex and find ways to make it safer. It was an amazing achievement.

I learned about all these sexual practices that I didn't know before. Part of the men's process was to think about all the things you can do that aren't sucking and fucking. All of a sudden, they would talk about shrimping... do you know what that is? [Laughter.] Sucking on toes. There were all these great practices, and it was just so cool to be honest about them. I felt like I owed a debt to that kind of thinking.

I also wanted to witness what went on. Joey Leonte, who was the director of publications for GMHC, was the one who hired me. He was one of three bosses I had at GMHC who died eventually of AIDS. He was always very special to me, because he recruited me out of NYU when GMHC had no equipment, no anything. [Sex in an Epidemic includes footage of Leonte talking about GMHC's low-cost production and distribution of safer-sex comics and of Jesse Helms condemning them on the floor of the Senate.]

The debates within the community in the beginning of the epidemic were intense. The conflicts between people who wanted to close the bathhouses or keep them open or the differences in politics between Richard Berkowitz and GMHC were at some points very acrimonious. [Berkowitz is a hustler turned safer-sex activist who features prominently in *Sex in an Epidemic* and whose pamphlet *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic* was one of the first publications to promote the idea that abstinence was not the only way to prevent HIV.] I tend not to want to get involved with the internal politics. I wanted to tell the story and bring out the differences, but not to judge anybody harshly, because, frankly, I think they're all heroes. I think in that atmosphere anyone who came to the forefront and offered comfort or help to people who were scared shitless, who's to judge them?

SE emerges from my life in the context of the epidemic; it's a collection of material from the period during which I was really active in AIDS activism. But I also wanted to bring this historical material into dialogue with current politics and activism around HIV prevention. I can't believe it's 2009 and we have only just perhaps struggled off the yoke of abstinence policies. The last segment of SE looks at prevention justice in a more honest way. Prevention justice is the big net that takes in comprehensive health education, abstinence, talking honestly about sex, the fact that if people don't have access to condoms, the advice to use them is impossible. If people don't have a home, they are not going to come up with the resources to practice safer sex, if part of their ability to sleep somewhere on any given night is dependent on their ability to trade sex. I see current discussions around HIV prevention as part of a larger continuum of discussion around social-justice issues.

AC: One of SE's important points is the connection between early HIV/AIDS activism, especially safer-sex activism, and contemporary abstinence policies. When people debate comprehensive versus abstinence sex education in schools, they don't necessarily bring queer activism or HIV/AIDS activism into those discussions, and the fact that you're linking them is important.

JC: We always get left out as the nutty aunt who can't be trusted in public.

AC: For example, as you tell it, the history of sex education in the 1990s and following under Clinton and Bush, such as the forced resignation of Jocelyn Elders from the position of surgeon general in 1994, has important precursors from the 1980s.

JC: So few people have ever seen the clip of the statement in support of masturbation as part of sex education that led to Elders's resignation. I really wanted to get the actual clip of her remarks, which were made at the United Nations on World AIDS Day. Shanti Avirgan [Carlomusto's associate producer] is the one who got it from the UN. I had been trying to assemble the clip of what she actually said from fragments (it's not on YouTube) in order to show how Elders was completely undermined and unfairly treated by the media. [Following the clip, *Sex in an Epidemic* includes a collage of the media coverage in which the word "masturbation" is repeated over and over, suggesting how Elders's comments were wrenched out of context in sensationalizing ways.] What she was talking about is just as important today, since only 5 percent of sex education programs are comprehensive.

AC: In addition to trying to capture an important moment in the history of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and gay men's responses to it, SE also does a great job of contextualizing that history and connecting it to other issues, such as feminist reproductive politics and contemporary sex-education politics. Can you elaborate on why this early safe-sex activism is so important to other forms of sexual politics?

JC: That's one reason I wanted to begin SE with some landmarks of the sexual revolution and political issues that have always caused consternation around people's sexuality, such as the Kinsey Report, women's access to abortion, and Masters and Johnson talking about people having sex. The subtext of the whole film is our society's reluctance to talk honestly about sex—they won't deal with it. George Bush didn't want to talk about sex, he wanted to talk about abstinence. He thought the problem is that people have too much sex outside of the confines of marriage. This view negates the sexual lives of so many people.

I wanted to show the continuity between this problem and the early battles we had to fight around AIDS and safer sex. For example, GMHC decided that a great way to reach men was through safer-sex porn. They came up with a very cheap way to do this with eight-page comic books featuring an eroticized fantasy

cartoon. Jesse Helms hit the Senate floor three days after over eight hundred thousand queers marched to Washington for rights. He came out with a bill prohibiting any federal money going to anything that promotes sodomy or a homosexual lifestyle and it passed ninety-two to two. This was in 1987, when HIV/AIDS was going through the roof, and we could have saved so many lives if we could have just allowed people to speak honestly to their communities. I'm not saying we're trying to put pornography out everywhere, but the model here was that community-based education works, and it needs to be specific for the populations that are affected. We needed general discussions, but we needed other things, too. This has been the political landscape for talking about sex. No one in government wants to talk honestly about sex or about what it's going to take to lessen drug use in this country.

AC: SE suggests that this earlier history remains relevant to the present and what you call "prevention justice." It remains counterintuitive to most people that pornography might be a model for safe-sex education or that the experiences of someone such as Richard Berkowitz working as a hustler might be an important source of knowledge that can feed into our public-health programs.

JC: Yes, there are many people out there, making low or no salaries, who come from communities that have come up with great interventions. Waheedah Shabazz-El [a member of ACT UP Philadelphia who is one of the current AIDS activists featured toward the end of *Sex in an Epidemic*] tells the story of how she was not feeling well one day and went to the doctor and was told she had full-blown AIDS. She looked around her community—she is Muslim—and wondered about the rise in HIV rates and started to think about intervention. One of the things she knew is that a lot of people in prison have HIV, and she wanted to make sure that people in the Philadelphia jail system would have condoms provided to them, because there was an ordinance passed in 1987 that condoms should be available. It was awful that this very ordinance was being ignored by law enforcement.

AC: I'd like to hear more about how this project continues the work of your other video projects, including not just the activist ones, but the more personal ones, and particularly about how you use your own video archive to make *Sex in an Epidemic*.

JC: I just spent the entire day moving my archive, which consists of tapes in white cardboard boxes. It makes me aware of the preciousness of archival material, because as I get older and the tapes get older, there's a lot of history that I don't think should ever be lost. That's why I try to make use of archival materials, especially if I feel the preciousness of their passing.

SE has my sensibility in it, even though I'm less present than in some of my other videos. The way I used the archival footage to go back and forth between

Larry Mass and Larry Kramer reminds me of *L Is for the Way You Look* and the story about Dolly Parton at the Reno show. [In *L Is for the Way You Look* (1991), Carlomusto investigates new forms of lesbian visibility and queer fandom by documenting her friends' responses to seeing Dolly Parton in the audience at a performance by the lesbian comic Reno at P.S. 122 in New York.] One person's story either validates or contradicts the next person's, and a kind of narrative is made.

It's also present in the montages, such as the one in which Richard Berkowitz is talking about it being the end of the world. (I think it's 1982.) He has just had a lump biopsied, and he is miserable, and he puts on Nina Simone's great rendition of "Everything Must Change" from her album *Baltimore*. It's the saddest song of impermanence. I wanted to use archival material from the LOVE collective, which was a fabulous lesbian collective from late 1970s and early 1980s that documented life as it was in New York City at that time. It's a great collection that is housed at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, but a lot of the tapes have never been transferred from three-quarter-inch (which is also known as Umatic tape), and they are in archival danger. I thought it was apropos to use that footage in a segment about fear of mortality.

AC: In an earlier conversation, you mentioned "the desire to relive a time through the sadness of its passing."

JC: For many of us who were coming of age during that time (or perhaps coming to a late coming of age), there was a real happiness and joy we felt about being honest and out there about who we were. This was such an important time in our lives for coming to an awareness of the power of community, but that power and joy got tied into a lot of grief and sadness when we saw many of our friends die. When you go back and look at some of these images of people in their prime, you can't help but know that so many of the guys in this footage aren't alive. It becomes like watching ghosts of the past. There's a ghostly feeling that is inherent in the moving image. That's why horror films are such a popular genre. There is a ghostliness when you see someone move and speak and you know they're dead. In *To Catch a Glimpse*, I used the comment made by one of the first people to see Lumière's cinema in 1885 — "When this device is made available to the public, everyone will be able to photograph those dear to them, not just in their static form, but with their movements and with speech on their lips; then death will no longer be absolute."

AC: How does *SE* serve a memorial function? In the closing credits, for example, you dedicate the work to AIDS educators who have passed, with additional clips of some of those who have been featured earlier in the video: Joey Leonte, Bob Cecchi, Michael Callen, Jed Mattes, Ray Jacobs, Ortez Alderson, Richard Dunne, Michael Shernoff, and Rodger McFarlane.

JC: I've been making this tape for over ten years. I've wanted to make this piece for a long time because so many fabulous AIDS educators that I knew who were dead had struggled up until they got sick to try to prevent people from getting HIV. And they were doing something really amazing because they were trying to do that without making anybody feel bad about themselves. That to me was the magic of what they did. They changed a lot of behavior because they went out into the community and they were who they were and they had a message that was relevant to the men they were speaking to. They had some innovative things that they tried because they knew these guys — they were these guys. They figured guys grew up on porn, so let's make some safer-sex porn.

AC: I think that conception of safer sex activism as emerging from everyday practices is one way that *Sex in an Epidemic* implicitly defines nongovernmental politics. In our earlier conversation, you said that filling the streets with public emotion is the first step in any radical change — that it isn't going to happen in a government office. You talked about showing the power of people gathering in the streets in the GMHC archival footage from a 1987 candlelight vigil in New York, which you described as emotionally charged material for you.

JC: I keep going back to that footage — I've used it in *Shatzi Is Dying* and some other tapes. These vigils were being held everywhere; that was not the only candlelight vigil where people were standing on the streets with candles in their hands at dusk. I keep on going back to that footage because I found that so moving. The footage that I took that day in New York of that candlelight vigil in 1987 was emblematic of the kinds of mass grief that we took into the street as part of what would boil over that year into activism.

AC: The focus on safe-sex intimacy in *SE* suggests that change begins with ordinary people and their daily practices, more so than in government policies.

JC: I think about the demonstration against *Cosmopolitan* magazine by the women in ACT UP and how we were shocked by how much of an impact we had. We were four or five lesbians in ACT UP who were having dinner, and one person walked in and said isn't this an awful article [about how heterosexual women are not at risk of HIV transmission through vaginal intercourse], and we started organizing. Maxine Wolfe [one of the founders of the ACT UP Women's Caucus, who is interviewed in *Sex in an Epidemic*] had an important role here, because she was such an experienced activist. Through her leadership, she provided really strong ideas about what was good in terms of organizing. We were going to talk to the doctor first before we ever protested to see if he would publish a retraction. We would have been really happy with that, but he wouldn't budge. So then the next step



## NOTES

1. For a foundational discussion of the importance of cultural activism, including video and other media, to AIDS activism, see Douglas Crimp (ed.), *AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988), as well as Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston (eds.), *AIDS DemoGraphics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1991), which documents ACT UP's distinct visual graphics. Other important discussions of AIDS media activism include Alexandra Juhasz, *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), and Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness and the Queer Moving Image* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). For a discussion of the distinctive role of affect in AIDS activism, see Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
2. These videos and many others are archived in the Royal S. Marks AIDS Activist Video Collection at the New York Public Library.
3. *Sex in an Epidemic* (2010) is distributed by Outcast Films, <http://www.outcast-films.com>. It had its world premiere at the NewFest in New York City in June 2010, followed by a screening at Frameline in San Francisco, also in June 2010.
4. For more on Carlomusto's work, see Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), and Julianne Pidduck, "Queer Kinship and Ambivalence: Video Autoethnographies by Jean Carlomusto and Richard Fung," *GLQ* 15.3 (2009), pp. 441-68.
5. Alexandra Juhasz, "Video Remains: Nostalgia, Technology, and Queer Archive Activism," *GLQ* 12.2 (2006), pp. 319-28.
6. See, for example, the video by Anne-Christine D'Adesky, Shanti Avirgan, and Ann T. Rosetti, *Pills, Profits, and Protest: Chronicle of the Global AIDS Movement* (2005) and the work of Health GAP (Global Access Project) (<http://www.healthgap.org>), and, in South Africa, Treatment Action Campaign (<http://www.tac.org.za>).
7. See *An Archive of Feelings*. Carlomusto has also been interviewed for the ACT UP Oral History Project (<http://www.actuporalhistory.org>), which now includes over one hundred interviews with AIDS activists that are available online and itself constitutes an important new activist media project for preserving and mobilizing the history of AIDS activism.
8. For this section of *Sex in an Epidemic*, Carlomusto uses footage from *Doctors, Liars, and Women: AIDS Activists Say No to Cosmo* (1988), the video she made with Maria Maggenti for the GMHC Living With AIDS series. She also showcases the work of the ACT UP Women's Caucus by including video documentation of the Shea Stadium action, in which, during a baseball game, they held up signs promoting safer sex. Carlomusto thus includes material that is drawn directly from her own experience as an AIDS activist, particularly experience that focuses on lesbian involvement in AIDS activism. For more on this aspect of ACT UP's history, see my *An Archive of Feelings*.

was planning this action, and all of a sudden, the media happened to pick it up, and then the next thing you knew it was on *Nightline* and it was on *Donahue*, and it became a national issue and change happened. Eventually, a retraction was printed, and we had a lot of time to talk about women and AIDS and risk. That was a good action, because it wasn't just about protest, it was about raising awareness.<sup>8</sup>

AC: You made an interesting point about people being able to make a difference even when they were scared, such as gay men inventing safer sex in the early days of the AIDS crisis or Waheedah Shabazz being willing to speak out, despite being in a vulnerable position.

JC: The fear and stigma of the early days was so pervasive. It's amazing that people such as Michael Callen and Steven Berkowitz and Joseph Sonnabend had the guts even to put a theory forward and say you can still have sex but care for one another. And use condoms.

I noticed people in ACT UP who were often doing truly outrageous things would talk about fear beforehand or having nothing to lose. The transition from having the emotion to actually doing something is very liberating. I remember someone getting up at an ACT UP Oral History videotaping, and he spoke about how he went to the governor's office and picked up the phone and he couldn't believe he was speaking from the governor's office.

AC: What are your goals for the distribution and reception of *Sex in an Epidemic*? I like how you use Maxine Wolfe's statement at the end of the film to put forward the idea that we don't need to be living with AIDS and that we could be imagining a world without AIDS.

JC: I would like *Sex in an Epidemic* to be a companion piece to a growing movement of people who want to reignite a discussion around HIV prevention in this country. We must get HIV prevention back on the agenda. It's really important that we bring down the numbers. Over fifty-six thousand people a year are getting newly infected with HIV and it's not necessary. I think it would be great if we could finally find a cure and stop the disease from spreading.

I hope this video becomes a resource for universities to use. I've been teaching now for a long time, over twenty years, and I don't see that many students are really informed on the issues or have a knowledge of the history of HIV. We need to have something less superficial so that they feel invested, so that it's not just "Use a condom," so that they understand it a little more deeply. It's not just about HIV, it's about being able to talk honestly about sex . . . and about not having sex. It's really important to be more open and honest about a variety of expressions.