

DOPPIOZERO

Rebels. Arte e AIDS nella New York degli anni '80

Vito De Biasi

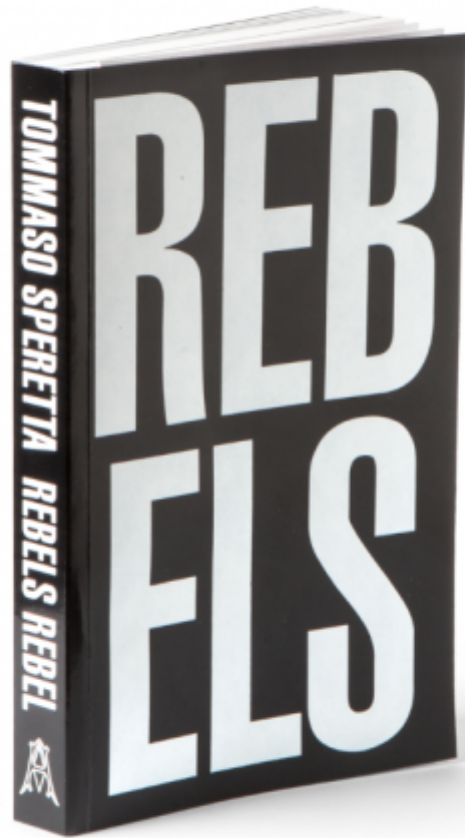
27 Ottobre 2014

Nella mostra *Disobedient Objects*, al Victoria & Albert Museum di Londra fino al 1 febbraio 2015, accanto ai manufatti di ieri e di oggi usati nei movimenti di protesta globali compare un cartello: “Molti di questi oggetti verranno restituiti ai loro proprietari una volta conclusa la mostra, perché sono stati creati e utilizzati per lotte ancora in corso”. Il tempio dell'arte e del design ha preso in prestito dalle strade manifesti, bandiere, maschere antigas, cartelli e gadget, in un'esibizione temporanea che non ha come scopo la conservazione e la musealizzazione del presente, ma la sua presentazione in un contesto curatoriale, che legge la storia dei movimenti attraverso i suoi oggetti, il suo design sociale.



Group Material, AIDS Timeline, installazione, 1989 – 90, ©The New York Public Library

In quella raccolta rientrerebbero a pieno titolo le operazioni di artisti e non artisti travolti dall'AIDS nella New York degli anni '80, raccontate da Tommaso Speretta nel libro *Rebels Rebel – AIDS, art and activism in New York, 1979 – 1989*, edito da Mer. Paper Kunsthalle: una ricostruzione ricca di materiali d'archivio che mette in ordine e analizza in profondità fatti storici e reazioni collettive di fronte a una piaga allora sconosciuta, che mise in crisi la società americana e dimezzò una generazione.



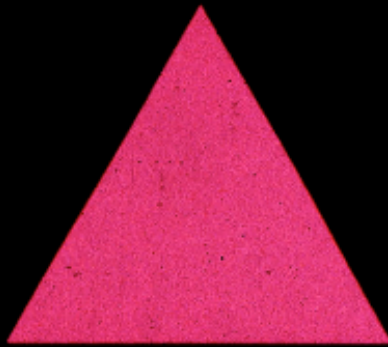
copertina Rebels Rebel, ©Met.Paper Kunsthalle

Il decennio di esplosione dell'AIDS, che travolse la minoranza GLBT delle metropoli americane, è oggi un evento lontano anche se non concluso, pronto per essere storicizzato e drammatizzato, come è accaduto nel recente film per la tv HBO, [The Normal Heart](#). Il lavoro di Speretta si inserisce invece in un ambito più specifico, quello della produzione creativa dei movimenti direttamente coinvolti nella vicenda: Group Material e i suoi componenti Tim Rollins, Julie Ault, Doug Ashford e successivamente Felix Gonzalez-Torres, e soprattutto ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power), un'associazione nata proprio con l'intento di fermare la crisi dell'AIDS, che si avvaleva del braccio artistico del collettivo Gran Fury. Il punto focale dell'analisi è ovviamente l'arte pubblica, quella particolare area espressiva che nel suo sviluppo passa dalla realizzazione di monumenti e memoriali alla creazione di opere e iniziative dalla forte vocazione sociale, rivolte a un pubblico più ampio di quello tipico dell'arte.



Gran Fury, You've got blood on your hands, Ed Koch, poster, 1988, ©The New York Public Library

Group Material fu uno degli esempi di arte pubblica di nuova generazione, perché cercava di restituire i meccanismi della democrazia nella propria organizzazione e persino nei propri lavori, tutti a partecipazione collettiva, dove spesso non si distingueva tra l'opera d'arte e il manufatto del non professionista. Con lo scoppio dell'AIDS e l'urgenza di occuparsene, la partecipazione di Group Material al discorso pubblico sul tema fu un approdo naturale, e il risultato principale fu *AIDS Timeline*, una linea del tempo che ricostruiva la storia di quel periodo riportando manifesti, flyer, dati statistici e testimonianze dirette, nel tentativo di restituire il contesto sociale entro il quale quegli eventi si stavano manifestando.



SILENCE = DEATH

Why is Reagan silent about AIDS? What is really going on at the Center for Disease Control, the Federal Drug Administration, and the Vatican?
Gays and lesbians are not expendable...Use your power...Vote...Boycott...Defend yourselves...Turn anger, fear, grief into action.

Diverso è il caso di ACT UP, nato appositamente per affrontare i conflitti sociali che questa nuova piaga stava portando alla ribalta, ferite storiche della società americana che stavano riaprendosi in tutta la loro virulenza: il razzismo, il sessismo, il classismo e l'omofobia. La malattia sconosciuta era chiamata all'inizio il cancro gay, o la peste gay, vista la maggiore incidenza nella comunità GLBT. Prima che ci si occupasse seriamente di AIDS come di un'emergenza nazionale, e internazionale, la società americana e il suo establishment semplicemente ignorarono il problema, nonostante il numero e la velocità preoccupante dei contagi, perché era ritenuto qualcosa che riguardava soltanto *quelli lì*. ACT UP si diede quindi il compito di portare la malattia e l'urgenza di una cura su una ribalta pubblica, non soltanto per la città di New York (basti pensare alle altre metropoli ad alta concentrazione di cittadinanza GLBT, o ad altre fasce colpite e ignorate dalla società conservatrice del tempo, i neri, i latini, gli homeless e i tossicodipendenti). Per ottenere l'attenzione e il palcoscenico in una società capitalista dell'infotainment, la via più efficace era adottare le stesse modalità della comunicazione di massa ufficiale, a cominciare dalla pubblicità.

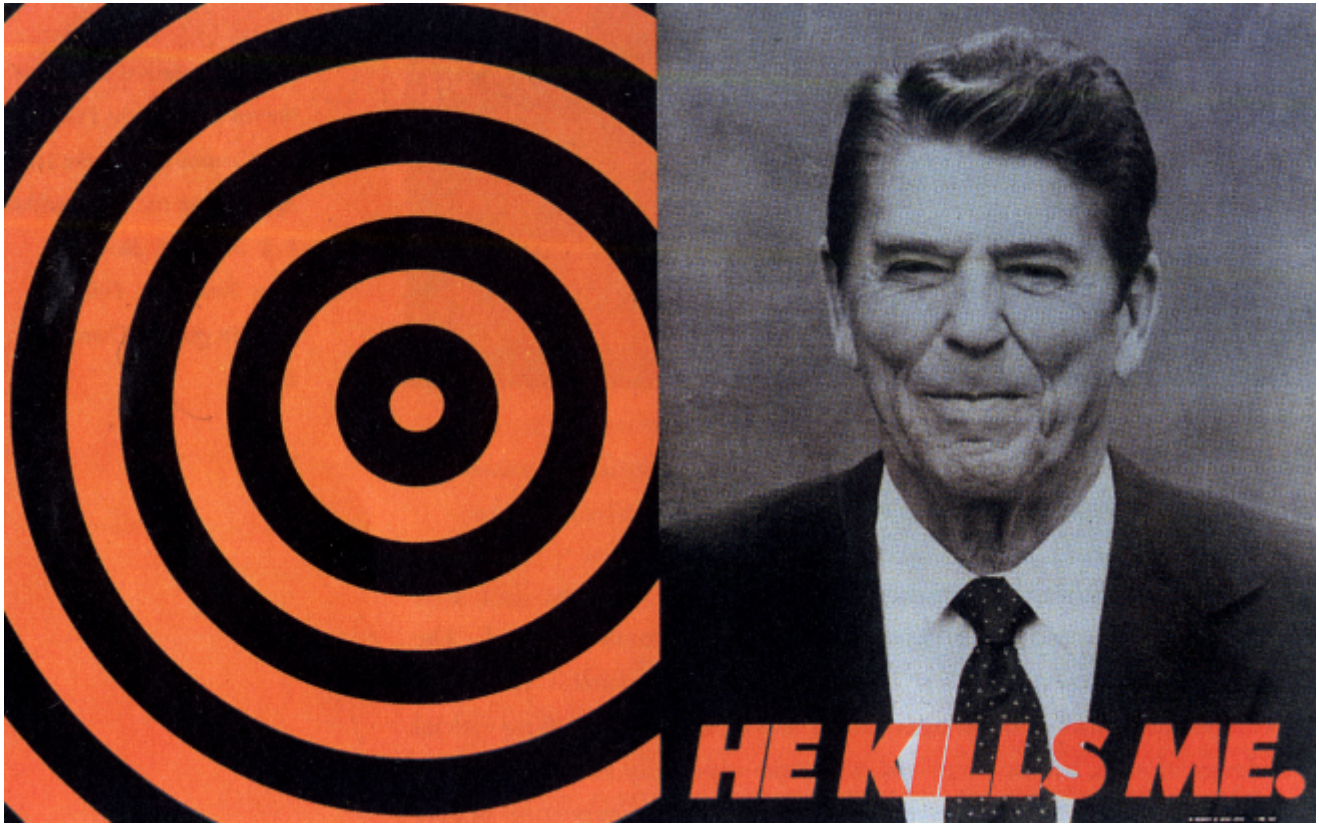


ACT UP Outreach Committee, stickers AIDS Profiteer, 1989, ©The New York Public Library



Membri di ACT UP Chicago con il cartello *Kissing doesn't kill*, Gay Pride di Chicago, 24 giugno 1990, ©The New York Public Library

Il capitolo dedicato ad ACT UP spiega puntualmente e con ricchezza di immagini come un'associazione riuscì a utilizzare le energie creative dell'arte per fare propaganda. I molti esempi riportati danno prova di una sapienza comunicativa degna di un potente ufficio stampa e marketing, nonostante spesso si organizzassero vere e proprie operazioni sovversive per mettere sotto accusa le istituzioni pubbliche e private, colpevoli di ignorare il problema o di volerci soltanto guadagnare. ACT UP produsse per esempio delle etichette adesive con su scritto "AIDS Profiteer", incollate clandestinamente sui medicinali della Burroughs Wellcome, l'azienda farmaceutica (oggi GlaxoSmithKline) che mise sul mercato il primo farmaco contro l'AIDS, l'AZT, a un prezzo altissimo, che solo in pochi potevano permettersi. Un bersaglio di ACT UP e di Gran Fury fu anche il presidente Reagan, che parlò pubblicamente di AIDS soltanto nel 1987, ben sei anni dopo l'esplosione del contagio, la cui immagine in un poster era accompagnata alla scritta a doppio senso "He kills me", "Lui mi fa morire (dal ridere)". E poi il sindaco di New York Ed Koch, il quale, come recitava uno spazio pubblicitario acquistato dal collettivo nei principali quotidiani locali, "affronta l'AIDS investendo in marmo e granito", cioè i materiali più usati per le lapidi. Il *New York Times*, accusato di sminuire la portata dell'epidemia, diventò *The New York Crimes*, un foglio che era una copia grafica dell'originale, pieno di informazioni occultate sull'AIDS, e che andò a ricoprire le vere pagine del quotidiano nei distributori della città.



Donald Moffett, He kills me, poster, 1987, ©The New York Public Library

"Meet The Conformers
Or Don't!"

The New York Times

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH THE NEW YORK TIMES

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, MARCH 28, 1989

Early Edition

New York Times high pressure systems
may be tested soon and some areas
made and even some clouds before
which clouds. Details at City Hall.

AIDS and Money:

Healthcare or Wealthcare?

Decisions Made
Disregard the Sick

Professors from health-care schools are in the vanguard of AIDS, which stands at the crossroads of medicine, morality and the marketplace. Through the trauma of human greed and money, the relationship between money and government programs to aid the AIDS crisis needs very close scrutiny.

EXAMPLE: AIDS is not just big money. It is big money. According to a report from the Health Resources and Services Administration, AIDS is now a leading cause of death in the United States. It is estimated that 15 million people with AIDS or HIV infection will die in the next 10 years. The cost of treating AIDS is estimated to be \$1 billion a year. The cost of preventing AIDS is estimated to be \$1 billion a year.

EXAMPLE: The complex and rigid FDA process for approval of new AIDS drugs makes the number of new AIDS drugs available in the United States very low. The FDA has approved only a few AIDS drugs. The cost of developing a new AIDS drug is estimated to be \$1 billion.

EXAMPLE: Federal funding for AIDS research is declining. The National Institutes of Health has cut its funding for AIDS research by 10 percent. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has also cut its funding for AIDS research.

EXAMPLE: AIDS is a deadly disease. It is estimated that 15 million people will die from AIDS in the next 10 years. The cost of treating AIDS is estimated to be \$1 billion a year. The cost of preventing AIDS is estimated to be \$1 billion a year.

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THOUSANDS OF NEW YORKERS MAY BE DYING IN THE STREETS

STATE'S HIGHEST COURT FINDS CITY LEGALLY RESPONSIBLE

NEW YORK, Mar. 27—A sweeping decision by the State Supreme Court today says that the city is liable for the deaths of thousands of New Yorkers who die in the streets because of the city's failure to provide adequate housing for the homeless. The court found that the city's failure to provide adequate housing for the homeless is a violation of the state's constitution.

The court's decision is a landmark ruling in the history of the state's constitution. It is the first time that the state's highest court has found a government entity liable for the deaths of its citizens. The court's decision is based on the state's constitution, which guarantees the right of every citizen to adequate housing.

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WOMEN AND AIDS: OUR GOVERNMENT'S WILLFUL NEGLECT

The AIDS crisis forces the question: How can we best protect women from AIDS? The answer is not simple. Women are at a higher risk of contracting AIDS than men because of the way the disease is transmitted. The government has a responsibility to protect women from AIDS by providing them with adequate information and resources.

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N.Y. HOSPITALS IN RUINS; CITY HALL TO BLAME



Mayor Koch examines the ruins of New York City after years of his neglect. Critics blame the demise of the hospital system and the lack of AIDS services on his administration.

KOCH FUCKS UP AGAIN

NEW YORK, March 27—Health-care officials in New York City are in a state of shock and disbelief over the state of the city's hospitals. The hospitals are in a state of severe disrepair, with many rooms unusable. The city's health-care system is in a state of crisis.

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Inmates with AIDS: Inadvertent Political Prisoners

NEW YORK, Mar. 27—A prison in New York is responsible for the death of a man who died of AIDS. The man was an inmate of the prison. The prison's failure to provide adequate medical care to its inmates is a violation of the state's constitution.

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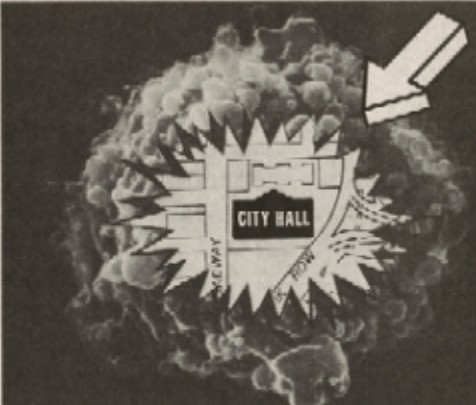
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Scientists discover real reason behind the high incidence of HIV infection in New York

What About People of Color? Race Effects Survival

Studies confirm what people of color have known for a long time: race is a major factor in surviving AIDS. In a study of 1,000 people with AIDS, researchers found that people of color have a higher mortality rate than white people. The study found that people of color have a higher mortality rate than white people.

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INSIDE

Coastal IV Drug Use Undercounted
Research reveals the projected HIV seroprevalence among IV drug users only counts the 100,000 IV drug users who are known to the state.

Homeless Teenagers and AIDS
Linn County, the only New York county for homeless adolescents, remains oblivious to its crisis. Research shows that the state's homeless teenagers are at a higher risk of contracting AIDS than other teenagers.

New York City: AIDS Deaths Help Communication
AIDS researchers reveal that the state's AIDS deaths are a result of the state's failure to provide adequate information and resources to its citizens.

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ACT UP usò tattiche di sovversione dei canali mainstream, una sorta di hacking ante litteram, che piegava in modo situazionista modalità di comunicazione di massa come la pubblicità per avere attenzione. Così facendo, diede grande slancio a quella forma di comunicazione antagonista, non soltanto concentrata sulle manifestazioni di piazza, che chiamiamo guerriglia, e che oggi è diventata un'altra voce del marketing ufficiale. L'abilità comunicativa di queste azioni rivela un intento che va oltre la semplice comunicazione dal basso di una comunità, e soprattutto oltre le capacità espressive dell'arte e le sue tecniche: "lottavamo per portare i nostri argomenti all'attenzione pubblica, né più né meno di come fa Coca-Cola per vendere", afferma uno dei componenti di ACT UP, Loring McAlpin, segnalando come la loro "arte" fosse semplicemente il mezzo più efficace attraverso cui ottenere quell'attenzione.



Gran Fury installa The Pope and the penis alla Biennale di Venezia del 1990, ©The New York Public Library

Non è un caso che il simbolo identificativo sotto il quale tutto il movimento si riconobbe, dopo aver ritrovato una compattezza che non aveva avuto dai tempi di Stonewall, fosse passato da semplice elaborazione grafica a vero e proprio logo, immagine astratta dietro la quale un'istituzione sui generis agiva. Silence=Death, la celeberrima scritta accompagnata dal triangolo rosa col quale i nazisti segnalavano gli omosessuali, nacque come accusa pubblica di un'omofobia persecutoria che stava tacendo l'epidemia dell'AIDS, ritenuta una malattia gay, e di conseguenza stava provocando troppi morti a causa del disinteresse per la ricerca di una cura. Grazie all'attenzione che ACT UP riuscì a ottenere nel corso degli anni, quel lavoro grafico tra tanti divenne il simbolo per eccellenza, il riferimento sotto il quale potevano raccogliersi tutti coloro che erano coinvolti a diverso titolo in quegli eventi.

WITH 42,000 DEAD

ART
IS NOT ENOUGH

TAKE
COLLECTIVE
DIRECT
ACTION
TO END
THE AIDS
CRISIS

The Kitchen

December

312 West 49th Street, New York, NY 10019

January

*Karen Finley
Two In Twenty
Stephen Petronio*

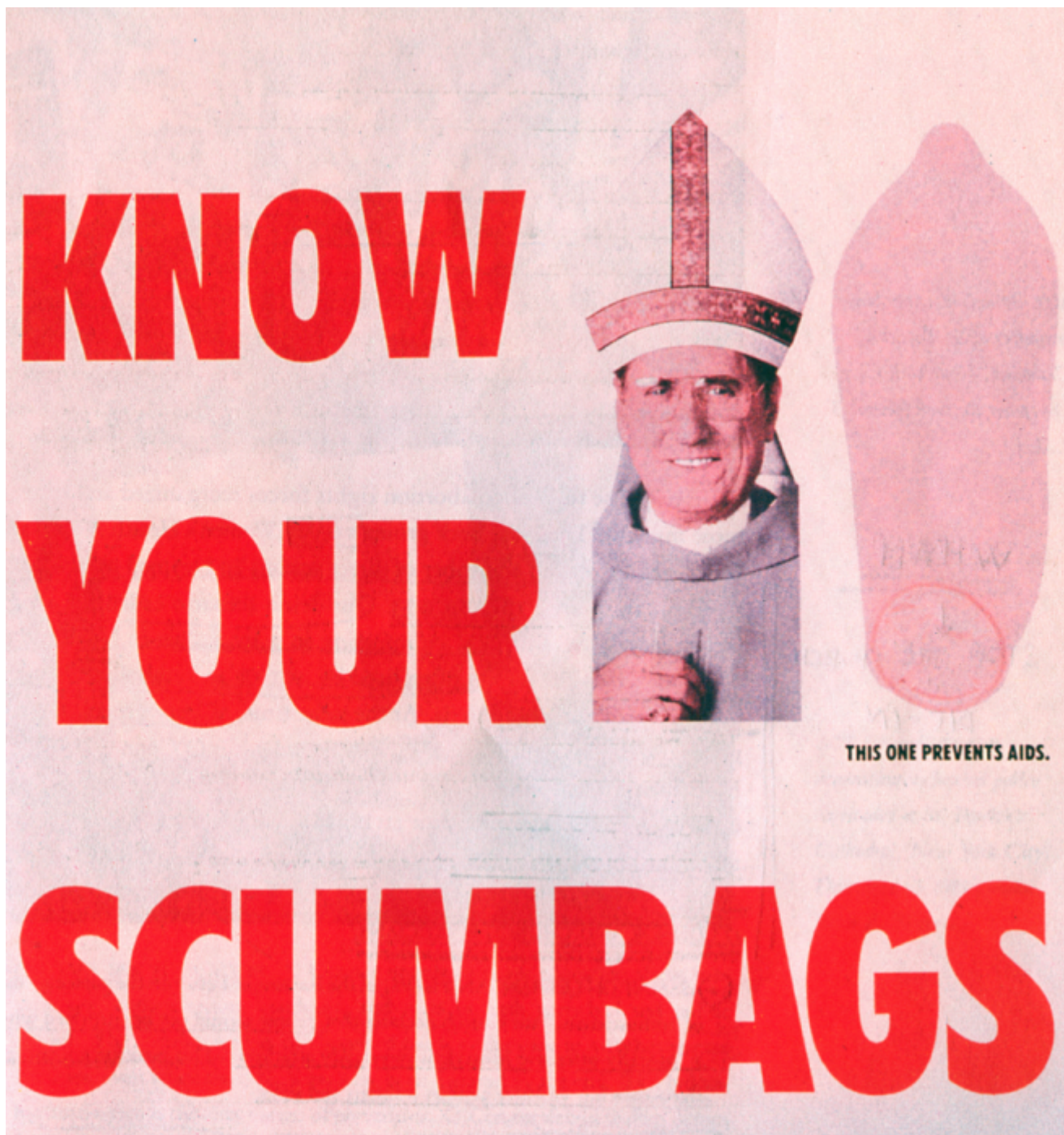
*11/30-12/3
12/6-28
12/8-18*

*Wolfgang Stahe
Robert Longo
Blueblack Collective
Spin Doctors*

*1/3-28
1/7
1/13-14
1/18-2/18*

Reservations 212-679-1111

Gran Fury



Gran Fury, *Know your scumbags*, poster, 1988, ©The New York Public Library

È chiaro come questo non sia più soltanto territorio artistico, e ne è la prova la perplessità con cui Gran Fury accettò l'invito a partecipare alla Biennale d'Arte di Venezia del 1990. Le polemiche che emersero dal lavoro presentato, *The Pope and the Penis*, un'accusa alla Chiesa cattolica contraria all'uso del profilattico e al tempo stesso un provocatorio accostamento di Giovanni Paolo II all'immagine di un pene in erezione, crearono un campo di conflitti che andava ben oltre il mondo dell'arte. L'allora direttore della Biennale Giovanni Carandente minacciò di dimettersi se quel lavoro “blasfemo, da non considerarsi arte” non fosse stato ritirato, per tutta risposta il gruppo, con la consueta abilità pubblicitaria, riuscì ad aggirare la pretestuosa questione sull'arte allargando il discorso a tutta la sfera pubblica, e finendo sui giornali mainstream al di fuori

del proprio territorio d'azione. Forse fu grazie a questa nuova esposizione mediatica se da allora anche in Italia cominciarono a comparire lavori specifici sull'AIDS, soprattutto a opera di Oliviero Toscani, che nel 1994 dedicò un intero numero della rivista COLORS di Benetton al tema.

WHAT DOES KOCH PLAN TO DO ABOUT AIDS? INVEST IN MARBLE AND GRANITE.



Welcome to New York, where AIDS is good for undertakers but bad for people. About 10,000 people. People the city left to die. And more will die, unless you do something. But what's something you can do?

Simple. Be at City Hall on March 28th at 7:30 a.m. Be a part of the largest AIDS demonstration ever. And what, exactly, are we demonstrating against? A city that spends only one half of one percent of its budget on AIDS. A city whose health department cuts costs by cutting estimates of people infected with HIV. A city where IV drug users with AIDS wait ten months to get into a treatment program when, on average, they have six months to live. A city that owns thousands of empty apartments while 5,000 people with AIDS live on the streets. And if you think AIDS only affects the people that get it, think



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about trying to get a hospital bed when many hospitals in New York are at 95% capacity.

Which is why we're targeting City Hall. And why we're protesting two ways: With a legal picket, and more forcefully, through civil disobedience. Civil disobedience training will be held on March 25th from 12-6 p.m. at The Center, 208 West 13th St. between 7th and 8th Aves.

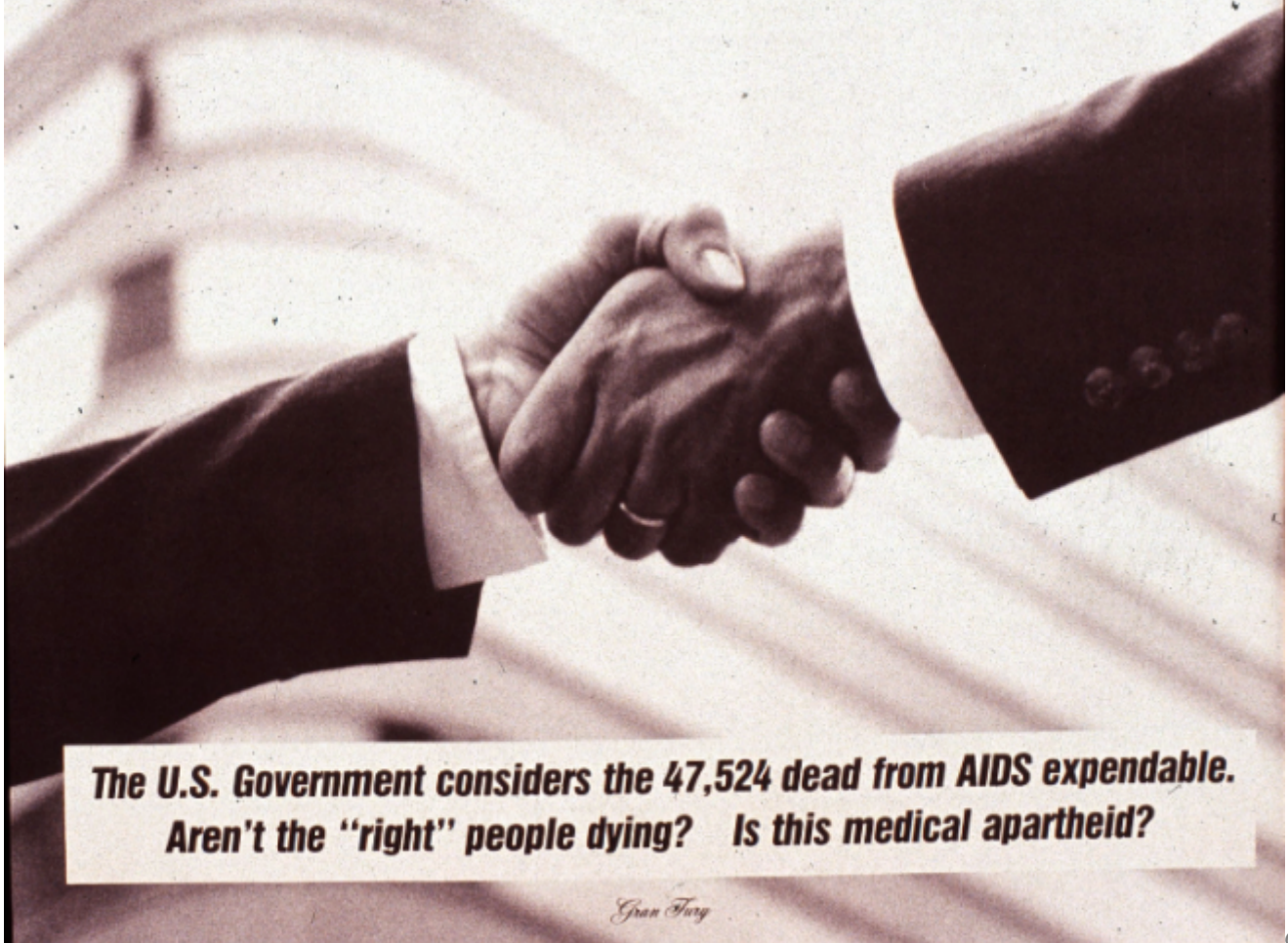
But whether you want to get arrested or not, join us on the east side of City Hall on March 28th. And if you want to know more about AIDS in NYC before the 28th, come to a teach-in at The Center on March 23rd (7-10 p.m.) or March 26th (3-6 p.m.). It's time we told City Hall to tackle the AIDS crisis, instead of burying it.

AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, 496 Hudson St. Suite G4, New York, NY 10014 (212) 533-8888.

ACT UP

Tra humor nero, détournements situazionisti e potenza del linguaggio, ACT UP segnò con le sue azioni un deciso sconfinamento dell'arte pubblica fuori dall'arte e dentro il pubblico, e nonostante il merito di Speretta di far emergere questa realtà con il racconto dei fatti e l'esibizione delle prove, la sua ricerca sembra voler far rientrare nel sistema dell'arte ciò che ne evade chiaramente i limiti. L'autore sceglie di domandarsi “che cosa succede all'artista in un periodo di forte crisi sociale?” invece di chiedersi “che cosa succede all'arte, sottoposta alle forze deformanti di una grande tensione collettiva?”, focalizzando la sua attenzione sulla figura dell'autore invece che sulla rivoluzione di una forma espressiva. Nella sua impostazione di fondo, *Rebels Rebel* parla di artisti, anche quando sono loro stessi a proclamare in un lavoro “Art is not enough”.

WHEN A GOVERNMENT TURNS ITS BACK ON ITS PEOPLE, IS IT CIVIL WAR?



**The U.S. Government considers the 47,524 dead from AIDS expendable.
Aren't the "right" people dying? Is this medical apartheid?**

Gran Fury

Gran Fury, When a Government Turns Its Back on Its People, Is It Civil War?, cartellone, 1988, ©The New York Public Library

Quella del decennio 1979 – 1989 fu una guerra, “la guerra della nostra generazione” la chiama McAlpin in un contributo ospitato nel volume, così come le generazioni precedenti avevano avuto la loro Seconda Guerra Mondiale, la loro Guerra di Corea, il loro Vietnam. E come in tutte le guerre, tra le molte battaglie c'è anche

quella tra linguaggi diversi. L'arte e il suo sistema sono infatti insufficienti per esaurire tutte le implicazioni di quel conflitto, e forse sarebbe stato più interessante approfittare di questa apertura in un linguaggio specifico per intravedervi quello che sarebbe venuto dopo: l'epoca della comunicazione totale. Una domanda che resta inevasa sembra infatti: che cosa ne è di quella forma d'arte già liminare, l'arte pubblica, costantemente dentro e fuori il sistema che la dovrebbe legittimare, quando viene spinta ulteriormente fuori da una certa appartenenza, durante un'emergenza storica che tende a ridisegnare i confini e ridefinire le cose? Che cosa diventa l'arte pubblica, quando la stessa nozione di arte e di pubblico si espandono fino all'esplosione?



Membri di ACT UP Chicago con il cartello *Kissing doesn't kill*, Gay Pride di Chicago, 24 giugno 1990, ©The New York Public Library

Un tentativo di rispondere a queste domande, abbandonando l'esigenza di tornare all'arte e agli artisti, si sarebbe avvicinato a quelle che Cecilia Guida definisce *spatial practices*, pratiche spazio-temporali che corrodono le suddivisioni tra artista e pubblico, tra spazio dell'arte e spazio del quotidiano, individuando nuove forme espressive e nuovi attori. Le avventure “totali” di ACT UP e degli altri gruppi, non solo artistiche, non solo politiche, non solo pubblicitarie, sembrano l'esperienza germinale delle pratiche contemporanee, dove “l'arte pubblica si fa processo di comunicazione e azione sociale nello spazio condiviso, mentre l'artista da autore diventa una sorta di agente sociale o fornitore di servizi” (C. Guida, *Spatial practices*, 2012, Franco Angeli).



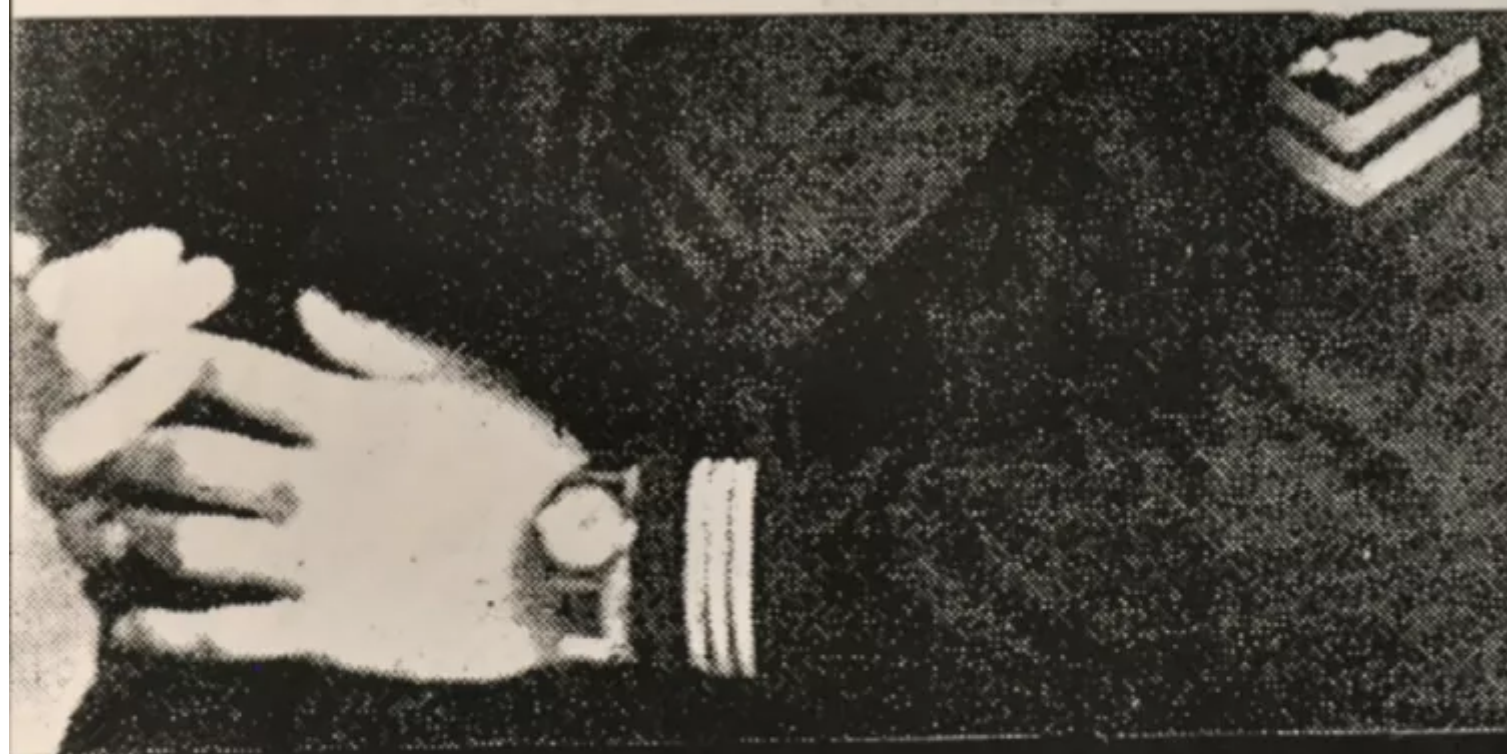
Sticker Men use condoms di Gran Fury sul sedile di un taxi, New York, 1988, ©The New York Public Library

Mettendo in crisi le vecchie definizioni di arte e comunicazione pubblica si possono capire meglio anche le odierne operazioni di scambio tra il museo e la strada, l'arte e le condizioni di vita, la politica delle istituzioni e il politico delle esistenze, come accade in *Disobedient Objects* citata in apertura, dove la non-arte passa per le sale di un museo come è passata e sta passando per le strade del mondo.

Se continuiamo a tenere vivo questo spazio è grazie a te. Anche un solo euro per noi significa molto. Torna presto a leggerci e [SOSTIENI DOPPIOZERO](#)



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KISS IN

Friday, April 29:

9:00 pm

10:00 pm

March from Christopher & West Sts.

Rally at Sheridan Square