



Emily MACENKO

The Politics of Representation

IMAGES OF MALE HOMOSEXUALITY
DURING THE AIDS CRISIS

FIGURE 1—*Nicholas Nixon, Tom Moran, January 1988, 1988*



IN THE FALL OF 1988, THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA), New York, hosted an exhibition of Nicholas Nixon's photographs. Titled *Pictures of People*, the show included an excerpt from a work in progress: a series of images of people with AIDS (hereafter PWAs) depicted at week- and month-long intervals. Later compiled and published in the book *People with AIDS* (1991), these photographs were featured alongside excerpts from interviews that Nicholas's wife Bebe Nixon, a science journalist and his partner in the project, had conducted with each of the fifteen sitters.

The purpose of the project was to capture honest and compassionate portrayals of people living with AIDS. In describing those who agreed to participate, Nicholas and Bebe state, "For [the sitters], the project was an opportunity to make something constructive out of a disease that had rendered them powerless over their lives in almost every way... Many were intent on showing that people could live well with AIDS, not merely die from it."¹

Although these photographs aimed to empower PWAs, they reinforced the stereotypes that the sitters themselves were trying to transcend, depicting them as isolated and debilitated, progressing toward their death on a well-documented timeline. Additionally, the narratives that accompany the images in Nixon's book emphasize the subjects' marginalization by framing each person in the way they had

contracted the disease—for example in the context of gay behavior or intravenous (IV) drug use.

During the 1980s, mainstream representations of AIDS victims such as Nixon's portraits perpetuated negative perceptions of PWAs and their lifestyles, often highlighting behaviors considered unconventional and subversive in the context of traditional norms. Conservative politicians such as North Carolina senator Jesse Helms tried to reinforce these perceptions; Helms deemed AIDS to be punishment for those who were morally wrong, and specifically targeted homosexuals as embodiments of deviance. On October 14, 1987, just days after more than half a million people had marched on Washington for gay rights in one of the largest civil rights demonstrations in U.S. history, Helms presented an amendment to a Senate bill that funded AIDS research and education in which he stated that "Every AIDS case can be traced back to a homosexual act."² This conflation of AIDS and homosexuality in the 1980s United States reinforced negative perceptions of gay men and created stereotypes that shaped mainstream representations of their bodies. This essay reads such imagery within the context of the horror film. I will discuss examples that furthered negative stereotypes of male homosexuals, portraying them as diseased, marginalized, and, overall, something to be feared.

To bring awareness to the actualities of this marginalized group and address the misinformation that was widely publicized and internalized as fact during this decade, gay male artists such as David Wojnarowicz and AIDS activist organizations including ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) expressed their identity in ways that critiqued the inaccuracies of mainstream (mis)representations of gay culture.

In response to the presentation of Nixon's photographs of AIDS patients at MoMA in 1988, a group from ACT UP staged a quiet

protest in the museum gallery where the pictures were displayed. Protesters handed out flyers with the headline "NO MORE PICTURES WITHOUT CONTEXT,"³ and argued that the pictures misrepresented the experience of PWAs. Presented without the context provided by Bebe Nixon's accompanying interviews, viewers could only read the subjects through the lens of stereotypes: as sick, lonely, and dying. For example, Nixon's portraits of Tom Moran, which featured him either by himself or with his mother, captured the deterioration of Moran's body, his face thin and sunken. In a portrait from January 1988, Moran lies on a bed wearing a hospital gown with no one around him, his eyes half closed and his lips parted slightly; he already looks like a corpse (*fig. 1*). His death inevitable, Moran is pictured as powerless, reinforcing the beliefs that ACT UP's presence was aimed at fighting.

Nixon's photographs coincided with media representations and images from popular culture that similarly constructed PWAs through the lens of sickness, loneliness, and impending death, while also correlating the disease to deviant behavior. Constructed through a heteronormative lens, such depictions drew on stereotypes that identified the gay male body as diseased, isolated, and dying. At a time when the Reagan administration and conservative political officials were calling for a national revival of traditional morals and values, this was not altogether surprising. Homosexuality was then widely perceived as a threat to masculinity and sexuality; such beliefs prompted imagery that conflated gay men and AIDS while reinforcing heterosexuality as socially acceptable.

Horror films of the eighties, while a form of popular media, capitalized on the fears spurred by such images of otherness. Embracing existing anxieties about ambiguous sexuality and the danger this posed to masculinity, *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*

(1985), directed by Jack Sholder, is a slasher film about the murderous villain Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund), who comes back from the dead to kill teenagers in their dreams. The film's story follows Jesse Walsh (Mark Patton), a teenager whose family has just moved into the house on Elm Street in the fictional town of Springwood, Ohio, where Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp), the main character from the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), had lived and suffered terrifying encounters with Krueger. In *Freddy's Revenge*, Krueger attempts to possess Jesse, both physically and mentally, causing Jesse to murder his high school gym teacher, Coach Schneider (Marshall Bell). As Jesse becomes an increasing threat to those around him, his potential girlfriend, Lisa Webber (Kim Myers), tries to save him from Freddy's possession with her undying love and devotion. These intrusions by Krueger, however, have different repercussions depending on if the person Jesse is interacting with is male or female—while the men die, the women are only threatened and barely harmed.

Freddy's Revenge highlights homosexual desire as a destructive and deadly force, revealing existing fears of male homosexuality and the body afflicted with AIDS and insisting upon heterosexual companionship as the foundation for a healthy, normal, and safe society. In studying the character of Jesse and the ways his relationships with men and women differ, *Freddy's Revenge* exhibits the consequences for questioning one's own (hetero)sexuality while reinforcing expected norms.

The film focuses desire and directs violence toward men, punishing them for their amoral sexuality and inappropriate desire. As horror film writer Carol Clover claims, "in most slasher films after 1978 ...men and boys who go after 'wrong' sex...die."⁴ Jesse's relationship with Coach Schneider offers a glimpse of homoerotic behavior in a

gruesome dream sequence in which Jesse's sexuality is challenged as he unwillingly succumbs to Freddy's control and brutally murders the coach. Early on in the dream, Jesse enters a gay bar called "Don's Place." He walks through the crowd and orders beer from the bartender, who is dressed in a leather outfit. As he pours his beer into a cup, a hand with a spiked, leather bracelet forcefully grabs his wrist—it's Coach Schneider. Next, Jesse is running laps in the gym while Schneider stands on the sideline and watches; the coach orders him in a sadistic manner to "hit the showers." While Jesse is in the shower, the coach is in his office, where he pulls two folded jump ropes from his cabinet and places them on his desk. Suddenly, balls start flying from the shelves in his office. Containers of tennis balls pop open and fly directly at the coach, who curls up on the floor, covering his head to protect himself. As basketballs, footballs, and volleyballs hurl toward him, the jump ropes fly off the desk and wrap around the coach's wrists as he is dragged into the showers screaming, "No ... No ... Nooo!" Jesse is frozen as he watches Schneider being tied up in a standing position, facing the wall. His clothes are torn off and towels whip his bare buttocks. The coach turns around with a terrified look in his eyes. He sees something, but it's not Jesse who continues to stand there motionless, staring voyeuristically through the thick shower steam. Schneider screams again, and the viewer can now see Freddy approaching. The coach is then sliced from behind; his body goes limp and a pool of blood runs down his backside. Although Jesse believes that he has witnessed the brutal murder of the coach by Freddy, he looks down to see that he is the one wearing the razor-fingered-glove (*fig. 2*). Killing the coach was not an intentional desire. Freddy's invasive presence tricked Jesse's mind, making the murder an out-of-body experience.

In the scenario with the coach, Jesse's body and mind were

FIGURE 2—Mark Patton (*Jesse Walsh*) wearing *Freddy's* glove

FIGURE 3—A pale and sweaty Mark Patton

FIGURE 4—Mark Patton emerges from the burned flesh of *Freddy Krueger* (*Robert Englund*)

All stills from *A Nightmare on Elm Street 2: Freddy's Revenge*, 1985

invaded—mirroring the experience of a diseased body being taken over with infection. The mainstream representation of the body with AIDS in the 1980s emphasized stereotypical physical characteristics, including weight loss and lesions on the skin—markers of a disease-stricken body, isolated and near death. To his own horror, in his dreams Jesse's body mutates to adopt Freddy's appearance and traits, as when his hand is encapsulated by Freddy's glove, becoming the weapon used to kill the coach. The nightmares and invasions take a toll on Jesse's appearance in reality as well; he begins to look pale and weak (fig. 3), resembling many of the subjects in Nixon's *People with AIDS* series. As his body deteriorates from lack of sleep and a diet of sleeping pills and coffee, Jesse's parents express concern for their son's health and even mention his need for a methadone clinic—suggesting that Jesse could possibly be a heroin user, which would place him among those at high risk of contracting HIV.

By exhibiting male-to-male interactions as destructive, the film parallels the conservative majority's use of fear to reaffirm moral values: Homosexuality was conflated with having a lethal disease. Conservative constructions of sexuality—presenting heterosexual relationships as socially expected and acceptable, and homosexuality as marginalized and repressed—are similarly reflected in the film through the progression of Jesse's relationship with Lisa. Although



the couple's relationship is challenged, *Freddy's Revenge* continually reinforces heterosexuality as Jesse's only hope of salvation.

In a final scene, Jesse has become fully possessed by Freddy. Chasing Lisa through the old power plant where he used to work, Freddy corners her. Fighting for her true love, she declares, "I love you, Jesse." The affection makes Freddy weaker; his gloved hand begins to tremble, and blood oozes from his flesh. Lisa runs, but doesn't go far when she is coaxed back. "I am not afraid of you. He's in there and I want him back," she cries. Lisa walks confidently toward Freddy as she says, "Come back to me Jesse, I love you." "He's dead!" Freddy screams back at her. Realizing her affection is having an effect on Freddy, she is persistent and kisses him, holding his head so he cannot get away. He pushes her forcefully back as fire ignites around them—signaling that Freddy cannot withstand Lisa's declarations of love. Catching fire, Freddy melts and his body collapses to the floor. As the fire begins to subside, the viewer recognizes that the threat has been destroyed; all that remains is a charred pile of flesh and the remnants of his infamous striped sweater smoldering on the floor. Lisa is motionless when she notices Freddy's arm move, but is relieved when the burned figure pulls the remaining flesh from his face to reveal that it's Jesse (*fig. 4*). Lisa slowly walks toward her stunned companion in tears, then embraces him. The couple has been reunited and the threat of homosexuality destroyed—Jesse's relationship with Lisa and her love saves him from Freddy and from the ambiguous sexual identity that had threatened his safety from the beginning of the film.

Freddy's Revenge reinforces the power of Jesse and Lisa's coupling to reiterate that homosexuality is destructive and threatening to the population—an argument that has remained popular among the conservative moral majority. Jesse's same-sex relationships produced violence and fear—reflecting a terror that was all too real with the threat

of AIDS taking over communities of people throughout the United States—but life is returned to normal when the heterosexual relationship between Jesse and Lisa is restored. The film reassures the viewer that Jesse's ambivalence about his sexual preference has been contained, and his relationship with Lisa is now a productive component of society.

In contrast to such negative mainstream representations of gay men and PWAs, artworks made by the group ACT UP and artist David Wojnarowicz in the late '80s and early '90s attempted to address misrepresentations of gay culture. Rather than use images of the body to address the AIDS crisis, these artistic responses evoked symbolic imagery that stressed the urgency of finding a cure for the disease, and emphasized the need for public awareness. By depicting the AIDS epidemic from the perspective of a marginalized position, ACT UP and Wojnarowicz aimed to educate the public.

Formed in the mid-eighties in response to the AIDS crisis, ACT UP used visual materials as a political tactic to disrupt the social sphere in order to convey their message. *Let the Record Show* (1987; *fig. 5*) was a mixed-media piece that countered mainstream images of the crisis by not including any visual depictions of AIDS patients. The site-specific work was installed in the window of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, and included the slogan "Silence = Death" in brightly lit, neon blue lettering. The slogan was originally created as part of ACT UP's Silence = Death Project in 1986 to highlight the lack of government attention toward the epidemic. Many suffered and died because of the Reagan administration's reluctance to provide information that would help those infected to understand what caused the disease and access available medical treatments. Reagan was completely silent about the AIDS epidemic until 1987, the same year Senator Helms's amendment prohibiting federal funding

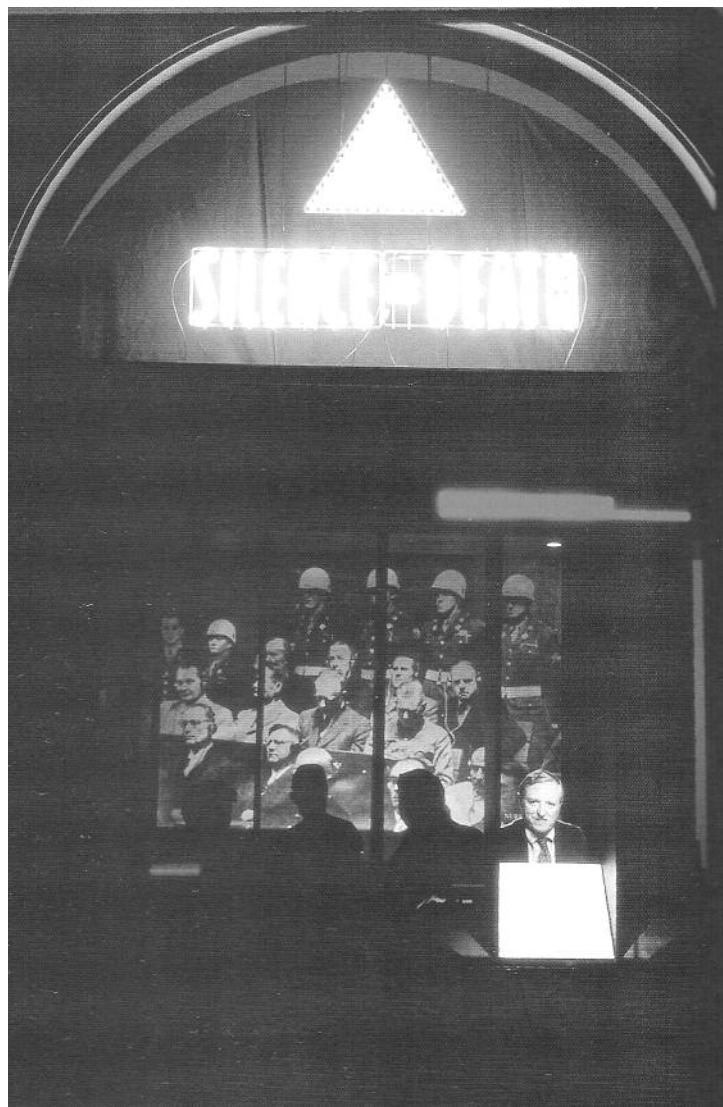


FIGURE 5—*ACT UP, Let the Record Show*, installation at the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1987

for AIDS education efforts was enacted. (The amendment specifically banned the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) from distributing materials that “promote or encourage, directly or indirectly, homosexual sexual activities.”⁵) Helms deemed the safe-sex literature developed for gay men to be “garbage.” He was particularly opposed to the *Safer Sex* comic books, which featured safe encounters between men in a comic book-style format (fig. 6). The books were created and distributed with private funds by the Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC), one of the largest AIDS service organizations in the United States. In describing these materials to the Senate, Helms remarked, “This subject matter is so obscene, so revolting, it is difficult for me to stand here and talk about it...I may throw up.”⁶ Even with the desperate need for proper education in a community most affected by and seemingly at risk of contracting the virus, funding was restricted because gay men were considered deviant, and in the words of Helms, “perverted human being[s].”⁷ The slogan “Silence = Death” highlighted these attitudes and targeted government agencies that restricted the dissemination of information about HIV/AIDS to the public.

Situated above the slogan was an upright, neon pink triangle. Downward pointing pink triangle badges were once used to identify homosexual men in Nazi concentration camps; here the triangle has

FIGURE 6—*Gay Men's Health Crisis, Safer Sex Comix #4, 1986; artwork by Donelan, story by Greg*

been reclaimed as a symbol of gay pride. The fact that ACT UP had used the slogan and the triangle in previous works made them familiar pro-gay visual symbols, increasing the work's impact.

In addition to these prominently displayed symbols, *Let the Record Show* depicted a photomural of the 1945 Nuremberg trials, in which senior Nazi military officers who were considered major war criminals were prosecuted for their crimes against humanity during World War II. Along with this photomural was "a series of six cardboard cutouts representing public figures who had, in the view of ACT UP, aggravated the AIDS crisis."⁸ Instead of the diseased bodies prominent in mainstream representations of PWAs, *Let the Record Show* featured the public figures at the forefront of the epidemic. For example, the work includes an image of conservative writer William F. Buckley, who had proposed in March 1986 that those infected with AIDS be tattooed on their upper forearm or buttocks so they could be visibly identified for the threat they posed to others. This irrational and inhumane way of thinking influenced those who were not familiar with the disease by creating the perception that those with AIDS should be quarantined. In creating *Let the Record Show*, ACT UP aimed to educate viewers by highlighting the realities that hindered public awareness, such as the lack of acknowledgement by the government of the epidemic.



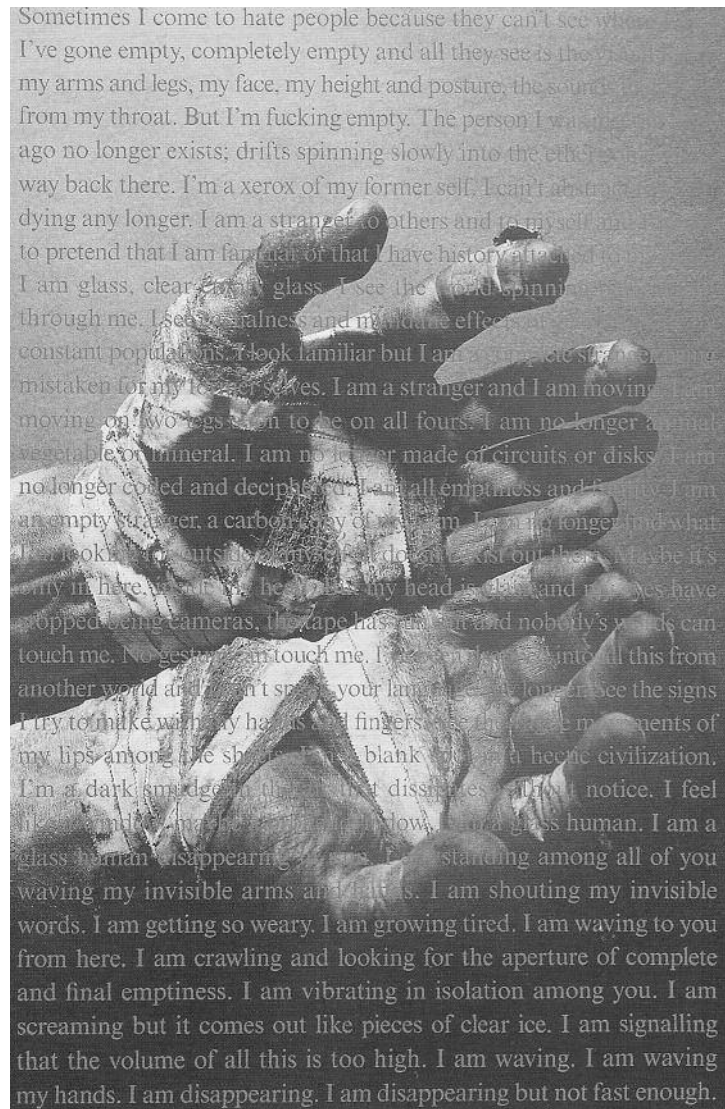


FIGURE 7—David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled*, 1992

Artist and writer David Wojnarowicz addressed AIDS in his works beginning in 1987, the same year he tested HIV positive, until his death in 1992. His art and his writing reveal his belief that 1980s American culture was in an ethical state of emergency because of the lack of compassion and understanding for those considered “other.” This belief evolved from Wojnarowicz’s own marginalization by a society that did not accept him because of his unconventional lifestyle. His confrontational works force the viewer to encounter uncomfortable situations, focusing on what art historian Jonathan Fineberg describes as “the real immediacy of bodily experience and identity in a culture filled with unacknowledged violence, which society masks in a barrage of consumer fiction and contradiction.”⁹ Fineberg is referring to the difficulty Wojnarowicz encountered in being othered, and suggests that he used his marginality as a launching point for creating works that inform a misguided society that was ignoring a major health crisis.

Wojnarowicz’s last work, *Untitled* (1992; fig. 7), completed only months before his death, is a black-and-white photograph of bandaged hands overprinted in red ink with an extensive text. The text, featuring a series of statements that begin with “I am...,” suggests that Wojnarowicz is the subject of the piece, a possibility that emphasizes the personal (and direct) nature of what the artist was trying to relay

to the viewer. Additionally, the text is small and hard to read, which requires the viewer to come in close to the piece, forcing an intimate relationship with the work. The entire segment reads:

Sometimes I come to hate people because they can't see where I am. I've gone empty, completely empty and all they see is the visual form; my arms and legs, my face, my height and posture, the sounds that come from my throat. But I'm fucking empty. The person I was just one year ago no longer exists; drifts spinning slowly into the ether somewhere way back there. I'm a Xerox of my former self. I can't abstract my own dying any longer. I am a stranger to others and to myself and I refuse to pretend that I am familiar or that I have history attached to my heels. I am glass, clear empty glass. I see the world spinning behind and through me. I see casualness and mundane effects of gesture made by constant populations. I look familiar but I am a complete stranger being mistaken for my former selves. I am a stranger and I am moving. I am moving on two legs soon to be on all fours. I am no longer animal vegetable or mineral. I am no longer made of circuits or disks. I am no longer coded or deciphered. I am all emptiness and futility. I am an empty stranger, a carbon copy of my form. I can no longer find what I'm looking for outside of myself. It doesn't exist out there. Maybe it's only in here, inside my head. But my head is glass and my eyes have stopped being cameras, the tape has run out and nobody's words can touch me. No gesture can touch me. I've dropped into all this from another world and I can't speak your language any longer. See the signs I try to make with my hands and fingers. See the vague movements of my lips among the sheets. I'm a blank spot in a hectic civilization. I'm a dark smudge in the air that dissipates without notice. I feel like a window, maybe a broken window. I am a glass human. I am a glass human disappearing in rain.

I am standing among all of you waving my invisible arms and hands. I am shouting my invisible words. I am getting so weary. I am growing tired. I am waving to you from here. I am crawling and looking for the aperture of complete and final emptiness. I am vibrating in isolation among you. I am screaming but it comes out like pieces of clear ice. I am signaling that the volume of all this is too high. I am waving. I am waving my hands. I am disappearing. I am disappearing but not fast enough.

Wojnarowicz's powerful statements confront the viewer with the idea that he is invisible to the rest of society; that because of the lack of attention and response to his cries of help, he has lost hope and is now wishing for death. Because of his otherness, society has placed him in a marginalized position, leaving him to witness the ethical crisis that has unfolded before him as the government refuses to properly acknowledge AIDS as a national health crisis and provide accurate information about the disease and its prevention to the public.

In addition to the text, *Untitled* depicts a pair of dirty, heavily bandaged hands that, in combination with the first-person narrative, embrace the emptiness of the "I am..." statements. The hands reveal a sense of pain and struggle as they reach out to the viewer in a manner that cries "help me." Their begging gesture encapsulates a feeling of defeat. While it has been speculated that these hands are those of the artist, Wojnarowicz never confirmed this assertion. By not claiming the hands as his own, he opens up the possibility that the subject could be anyone. Through this vague identity, Wojnarowicz aimed to communicate with the viewer a figure that remains invisible; a person who has been ignored.

Wojnarowicz's *Untitled* creates an intimate space with the viewer, who must lean in to read the small text presented; a text that highlights a personal moment of death. This intimacy was intended to

make the AIDS virus real to mainstream viewers—illuminating a reality that was being blurred and misconstrued by the media and political figures. With *Untitled* Wojnarowicz made the disease visible—and personal, with the revelation that he, the artist, had contracted the disease and was going to die from it.

In his AIDS-related works, Wojnarowicz exposed a difficult subject. He recognized the misconceptions that influenced and reinforced prejudices against the gay male body and PWAs. His dissatisfaction with societal ignorance and misunderstanding, along with his desire to make visible what mainstream society was complicit in keeping invisible, influenced his popular *Sex Series* (1988–89; fig. 8), which comprises eight untitled photomontages. Each work features a negatively printed black-and-white image containing circular insets depicting pornographic homosexual imagery taken from 1950s and '60s amateur porn films (fig. 9). As art historian Richard Meyer explains, these insets “[serve] as apertures that magnify an otherwise unseen or submerged erotics.”¹⁰ Meyer identifies the visibility that people who embody otherness, particularly male homosexuality, face in a predominantly heterosexual society. Wojnarowicz’s intention was to position male homosexuality as a subculture that is integrated with our society as a whole. Because of the scrutiny toward difference, there is a sense of secrecy in these snippets of gay porn. As curator Peter F. Spooner has noted:

*[The insets] present “close-ups” of activities that go on within the larger landscapes that Wojnarowicz depicts, but that are usually hidden from view. Their representation in negative enforces the idea that what they depict is an alternative reality, no less real and always behind the “positive” reality we are generally encouraged to see.*¹¹

By contrasting these detailed, close-up porn shots with background images displaying the vastness of land-, sea-, and sky-scapes,

Sex Series presents taboo topics as a part of the everyday. AIDS and homosexuality existed as part of everyday life, but it was up to the individual to ignore their existence or to acknowledge them. In *Sex Series*, Wojnarowicz uses his own identity to provide a basis for confronting society’s ethical failings. Producing works based on his own sexuality and life experiences, Wojnarowicz encompasses the ability to create sexually direct and intellectual works reflecting painful self-scrutiny and exposure that counter the mainstream representations and relate to the viewer on a more personal level.

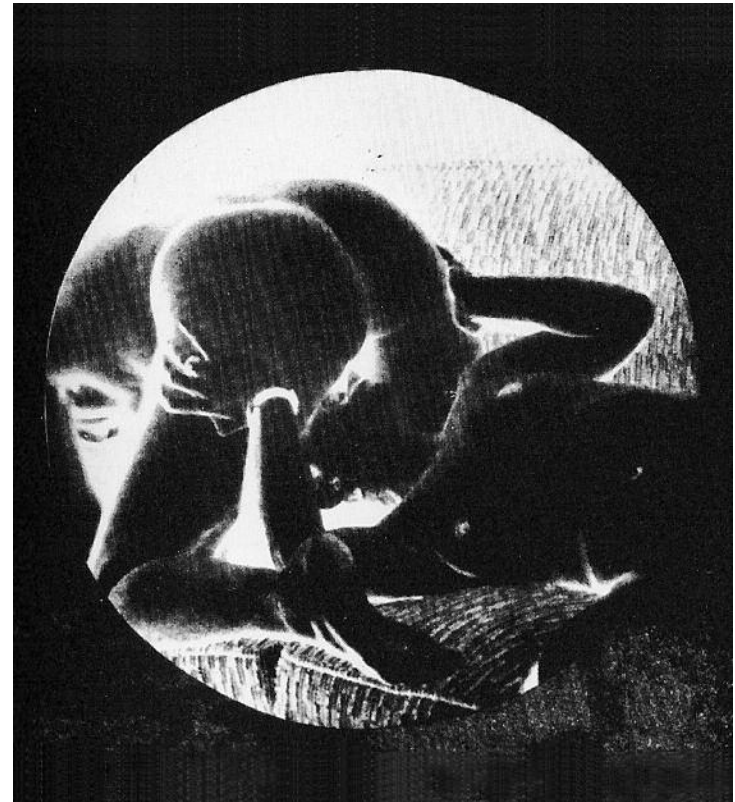
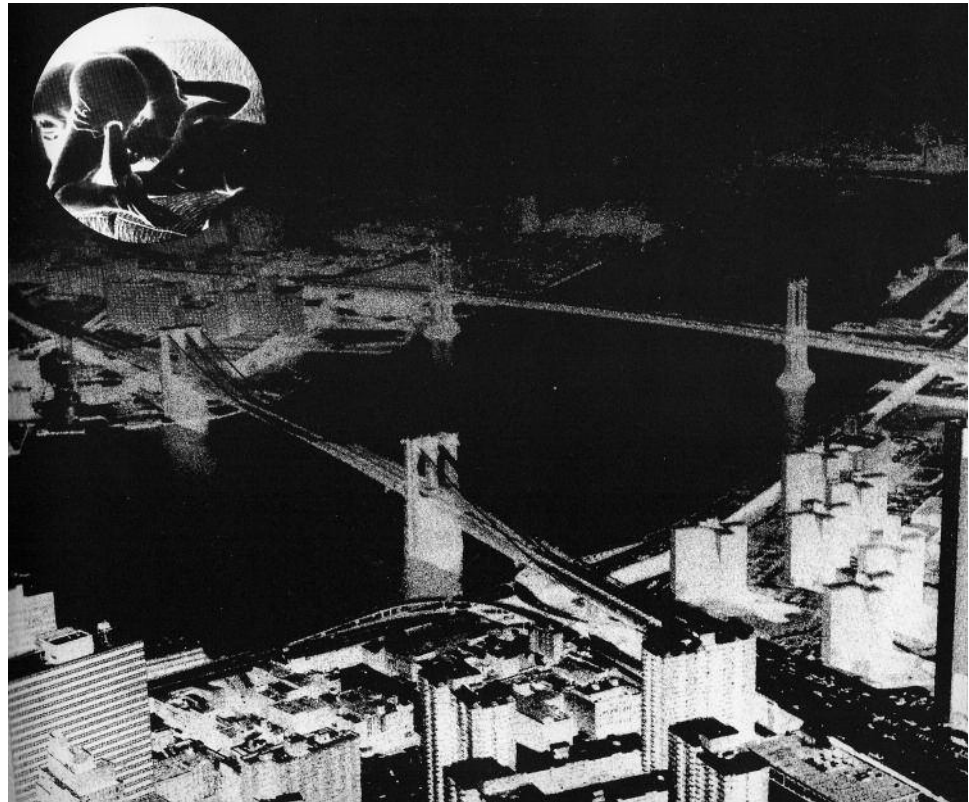
Wojnarowicz and ACT UP influenced and expanded our ways of thinking. Unfortunately, mainstream representations continue to further the perception of homosexuality as morally wrong, demeaning nonnormative sexualities and encouraging a lack of respect and understanding for otherness. This stance was perhaps most clearly expressed in November 1989 by political commentator Patrick Buchanan, who encouraged a lack of sympathy for AIDS victims, declaring:

*The gays yearly die by the thousands of AIDS, crying out in rage for what they cannot have: respect for a lifestyle Americans simply do not respect; billions for medical research to save them from the consequences of their own suicidal self-indulgence. Truly, these are lost souls, fighting a war against the Author of human nature, a war that no man can win.*¹²

Although not as prominent today, such views continue to exist, reflecting a society that marginalizes and represses those who are different.

Stereotypes and misconceptions about homosexuality have repeatedly been used to further traditional values of gender and sexuality. That the right-wing moral agenda still pervades society was evident in the recent debate surrounding the Wojnarowicz film *A Fire in My Belly* (1987), which was briefly included in the exhibition *Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* at the

FIGURE 8 AND FIGURE 9 (DETAIL)—David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled*, from *Sex Series*, 1988–89



Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. The exhibition, which ran from October 2010 through February 2011, was criticized shortly after its opening for including Wojnarowicz's film. The work was controversial because of a segment that depicts the image of a crucified Jesus covered in ants (*fig. 10*). Right-wing groups, such as the Catholic League (a Catholic civil rights organization), as well as conservative politicians including Republican House Speaker John Boehner, argued that the video evoked an anti-Christian message and was created to intentionally insult Christianity. Museum director Martin Sullivan tried to redirect the controversy by discussing Wojnarowicz's intentions, remarking on the film's connections to AIDS and the suffering of the disease's victims. Even though these criticisms stemmed from what appeared to be outrage over material considered offensive, this controversy suggests that conservative individuals and Catholic civil rights organizations were extending their earlier attacks on homosexuality and AIDS.

This distaste for homosexuality was evident in attacks that addressed the entirety of the exhibition. *Hide/Seek* comprised works by multiple artists in a variety of media and presented a diverse picture of sexuality, encouraging discussion that reflected on marginalization and evolving societal attitudes toward sexuality and desire. Political representatives directly targeted Wojnarowicz's video, but also expressed their dislike for the exhibition as a whole, remarking that it should be shut down. Along with Boehner, incoming House Majority Leader Eric Cantor argued for closing *Hide/Seek* and encouraged Smithsonian officials to "acknowledge the mistake and correct it..."¹³ These remarks set the tone for the exhibition and the reception of Wojnarowicz's piece. Museum officials were urged to admit that including the work had been a "mistake." The controversy provided a negative context that influenced public perception. An online poll

FIGURE 10—David Wojnarowicz, *A Fire in my Belly* (still), 1987



featured on the NBC Washington website tracked readers' reactions to this controversy. While 51 percent responded that they were "furious," 29 percent were "thrilled."¹⁴ This poll is evidence that the mentality establishing homosexuality as wrong still persists among the U.S. population.

Ultimately it is up to viewers to understand what works like Nixon's and Wojnarowicz's—as well as pop culture imagery and film such as *Freddy's Revenge*—are *really* telling us. We need to unpack what's on the surface in mainstream art and film representations that address gender and sexuality, and decipher the underlying messages that further negative perceptions and stereotypes. Looking at *Freddy's Revenge* in the context of the 1980s AIDS crisis reveals conservative efforts to instill traditional values and morals of heterosexuality while depicting homosexuality as destructive and deadly. As a counterpoint, the work of gay male artist David Wojnarowicz and the art-activist organization ACT UP depict the gay male body in ways that critique the inaccuracies in pop culture (and some art) portrayals. Examining these two arenas of representation in film and art encourages viewers to question perception and discrimination in our current society, while understanding art as a powerful medium to confront and redirect these stereotypes.

Notes

- 1 Nicholas Nixon and Bebe Nixon, foreword to *People with AIDS* (Boston: David R. Godine Publisher, Inc., 1991), viii.
- 2 *Congressional Record* (October 14, 1987): SI4202–SI4220, quoted in Douglas Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," in *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America*, ed. Brian Wallis, Marianne Weems, and Philip Yenawine (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 146.
- 3 The text on the ACT UP flyer can be read in full in Douglas Crimp, "Portraits of People with AIDS," in *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 87.
- 4 Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 34.
- 5 Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity," 147.
- 6 Quoted in Carole S. Vance, "The War on Culture," in *Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS*, ed. Ted Gott (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 103.
- 7 *Congressional Record*, quoted in Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity," 145.
- 8 Richard Meyer, *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 225.
- 9 Jonathan Fineberg, *Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000), 462.
- 10 Meyer, 252.
- 11 Peter F. Spooner, "David Wojnarowicz: A Portrait of the Artist as X-Ray Technician," in *Suspended License: Censorship and the Visual Arts*, ed. Elizabeth C. Childs (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 350–51.
- 12 Quoted in Meyer, 247.
- 13 P.J. Orvetti, "A Portrait of Cowardice? Gallery pulls video after complaints," www.nbcwashington.com/the-scene/events/A-Portrait-of-Cowardice-111117169.html, accessed March 10, 2011.
- 14 *Ibid.*