Remembering the AIDS Quilt

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Anniversaries, by convention, invite and invent time passages: rhetorical embodiments of retrospective and retroactive experiences; mappings of routes from those pasts through contemporaneous frames into prospective futures; interpellations of us as chronological or epochal or historically contingent and contiguous beings. This project began as a special issue of *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* marking the twentieth anniversary of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, and by the time of this volume’s publication we will be approaching its twenty-fifth. Commemorating an anniversary of the AIDS Quilt complicates the familiar epideictic mode because commemoration in this case must always be substantially eulogistic. As such, we must always return to the fundamental questions asked by Eve Sedgwick:

From a tombstone, from the tiny print in the *New York Times*, from the panels on panels on panels of the NAMES Project Quilt, whose
voice speaks impossibly to whom? From where is this rhetorical power borrowed, and how and to whom is it to be repaid? We miss you. Remember me. She hated to say goodbye. Participating in these speech acts, we hardly know whether to be interpellated as survivors, bereft; as witnesses or even judges; or as the very dead.¹

With Sedgwick in mind, as well as Paula Treichler’s now-idiomatic description of AIDS as an “epidemic of signification,” I begin Remembering the AIDS Quilt with three time passages that for me exemplify the spirit of commemoration and critique that animates these engaging essays on this epidemic text.²

In his posthumously published volume of essays on AIDS, Queer and Loathing (1994), author and activist David B. Feinberg opened his tribute to “David P.” by lamenting how the epidemic had left him bereft not only of the lost, but also of the rhetorical resources to convey their histories: “In these horrible times we have been forced to abbreviate the mourning process. How many people can you grieve for properly when everyone is dying? I wrote a novel for Jim Bronson, whom I barely knew. I wrote stories about my friends Saul Meissler, Glenn Peter Pumilia, and Glenn Person. Now I am reduced to brief essays in memoriam. Eventually all will be reduced to nothing but a litany of names chanted at the Quilt, panels of cloth the size of a coffin.”³

The impetus for this book came in a start on a Sunday morning in November 2005 while rereading Christopher Capozzola’s essay on the AIDS Quilt for my course on public memory. That I was seized by an awareness of the imminent anniversary is ironic given that Capozzola insightfully places the AIDS Quilt in history within the very specific contexts of gay liberation and AIDS activism in the Reagan era.⁴ But I think it was, in fact, such historical precision that precipitated my recognition of the momentous present, what that present might mean, and the ways in which the past might envelop you at the expense of the here and now. When a week later I wrote to ask Cleve Jones for permission to reprint material from his memoir Stitching a Revolution, he responded, “I must admit that I was taken aback by the realization that next year marks the 20th anniversary of the first display.” What did Jones mean by this? I
imagine that, in no small part, and perhaps with lamentation, he had in a
start measured the distance between then and now.

On the 2004 DVD edition of Jeffrey Friedman and Rob Epstein’s
documentary *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt* (1989), we twice
find the beloved activist Vito Russo waxing prophetic about a time after
AIDS, about legacies and the archive. In the peroration of his 1988 speech
“Why We Fight,” memorably delivered at two ACT UP actions that year,
Russo observed:

Don’t ever forget . . . remember, that some day, the AIDS crisis is going
to be over. And when that day comes, when that day has come and gone,
there are going to be people alive on this earth, gay people and straight
people, and black people and white people, men and women, who are
going to hear the story, that once, a long time ago there was a terrible
disease and that a brave group of people stood up and fought and in
some cases died so that others might live and be free.

Russo’s visionary eloquence also provides in voiceover the perora-
tion of the documentary itself, as we glance one last time at the Quilt
displayed at sunset in the sightline of, in juxtaposition against, the White
House: “I think what we want to see eventually is an end, a day when
we can stop adding panels to this quilt and put it away, as a symbol of a
terrible thing that happened and that’s now over. You know we forget that
some day this is going to be over. Some day there’s going to be no such
thing as AIDS, and people will just look back and remember that there
was a terrible tragedy and we survived.”

*Yesterday*

In the untimely loss of your noble son, our affliction here, is scarcely
less than your own. So much of promised usefulness to one’s country,
and of bright hopes for one’s self and friends, have so rarely been so
suddenly dashed, as in his fall. . . . In the hope that it may be no intru-
sion upon the sacredness of your sorrow, I have ventured to address you
this tribute to the memory of my young friend, and your brave and early fallen child.

—Abraham Lincoln to the Father and Mother of Col. Elmer Ellsworth, May 25, 18616

I meditate on Lincoln, during a period of politicized bicentennial commemoration, because his funereal voice, his epideictic eloquence, is perhaps without equal in U.S. history, although the AIDS Quilt richly echoes all that made Lincoln’s eulogies wise and powerful; because it has often been said that the scope and depth of loss suffered during the first wave of the AIDS epidemic compare only to the toll of war; because of the torturous irony, given the Reagan and Bush regimes, in quoting a U.S. president whose first impulse in the face of tragic human loss was to name and to honor the dead, and to console those intimates left behind—to sincerely mourn. And also because of time: Lincoln’s memorial is poignant because it is conjured out of grief for his beloved friend who died, literally, the day before. Immediacy, like amber, achieves a certain quality of preservation unmatched by more distant commemorative expression. The same is true for singularity. As David Herbert Donald remarked of the substantial cultural impact of Ellsworth’s death as the first casualty of the Civil War, “The tragedy . . . would have gone almost unnoticed in later years, when deaths were reported by the thousands.”7

With this in mind, let me return to the first of our time passages. I quoted David Feinberg because it is imperative that we remember AIDS in history, historicize its memorialization, and strive for an immediacy that will conjure, if necessarily imperfectly, the mourning time(s) embodied in the Quilt.8 It is no longer the case, as Thomas Yingling insightfully observed, that “discourse on AIDS invariably invokes the notion of history,” which is all the more lamentable because, according to Cindy Patton, “Only when we stand and face the unnarratable horrors can we appreciate the modes of redress that have been left in abeyance because the story of AIDS we now tell leads us to misrecognize the utter contingency of the political responses we have known.”9 The tragedy of AIDS is in an important sense a tragedy of public memory: on the whole it cannot be said that communities remember the first wave of the epidemic, the
first display of the AIDS Quilt, as if it were yesterday. The reasons for this are varied, including the deaths of original memory agents, generational and demographic changes, the cocktail of antiretroviral drugs that has dramatically altered the meanings and experience of this now “chronic” illness, and the lack of a will to history and distorted narratives by and about the stigmatized peoples primarily taken in those dark nights of the AIDS ascendancy. We must retrieve those “horrible times” in order to query about mourning in an epidemic and Feinberg’s representative ambivalence about the Quilt as an extraordinary manifestation of that epidemic mourning.

Feinberg, in his assessment that “eventually all will be reduced to nothing but a litany of names chanted at the Quilt, panels of cloth the size of a coffin,” was both right and wrong, and spoke about both the memorial and activist impulses that animated engagements with the AIDS Quilt in its early years. Any reckoning with this history must begin in the despair and disorientation Feinberg expresses. The breathtaking body count, in the cumulative tally and the speed with which it mounted in the 1980s, overwhelmed infrastructure and psyche. At grounds zero in San Francisco and New York, Los Angeles and Miami, one typically stood terrified and powerless at the edge of what was once the safe harbor, watching, denying, raging, as the tidal wave swept through. Moreover, the intimacy of the epidemic—as the term more precisely suggests but cannot adequately convey—exacerbated the loss. One’s physical body, whether in decline or in fear of diagnosis and death, and one’s extended amative body of lovers, friends, community, and culture, recently unfettered, was now at the last of the tether. I am reminded of David Rabe’s play *Streamers*, the title of which refers to those in free fall whose parachutes won’t open.

To make matters worse, most Americans, which of course means straight Americans, didn’t flinch as the bodies hit the ground. Out of apathy or hatred, the “general population,” as it was then invidiously and disastrously called, and every institution of power at every level, moralized, demonized, ostracized, neglected, and stalled. The defamation was only slightly less devastating than the silence, both enveloping. We might define this ugly, harrowing context according to the presidency that constituted and governed it. Dennis Altman explained:
In a different sort of society AIDS would be perceived as a crisis of public health rather than a gay issue. In the United States in the first half of the 1980s the coincidence of a weak public health sector and a strong emphasis on community identity has helped shape the particular form the epidemic is taking. Once again the sort of research undertaken, the provision of health care, the response of hospitals and the medical profession, the way in which education of both the public and the “risk groups” is conducted, are all affected by political and cultural factors. The halfhearted response of governments, the considerable stigmatization of those struck by the illness and the politicization of the disease as revealed in the general assumption that AIDS is “the gay plague” all help to give the epidemic certain characteristics of Reaganism.11

Thus it was not the illness alone that diminished Feinberg’s mourning process. As Douglas Crimp memorably observed, “during the AIDS crisis there is an all but inevitable connection between the memories and hopes associated with our lost friends and the daily assaults on our consciousness. Seldom has a society so savaged people during their hour of loss.”12 Lawrence Howe called it “the most monumental instance of American social neglect since Jim Crow.”13 It is understandable, then, that Feinberg lamented that the inexorable deterioration and degradation of all those cherished lives would end in tiny fragments of name and cloth—terrible metonymy, *memento mori*.

Given this context, the AIDS Quilt constituted an extraordinary rhetorical turn, a reversal and transformation of signification, of meanings, of vision. The narrative of its inception and instantiation between 1985 and 1987 is best left to its creator, Cleve Jones, whose fragments of memoir commence this volume as prologue.14 It is enough here to emphasize that out of homophobic violence, personal and collective loss, his own HIV diagnosis, and hate and anger and despair emerged Jones’s memorial of love and courage and hope. The AIDS Quilt consists of three-by-six handcrafted panels, sewn together in twelve-by-twelve blocks. At the first display in October 1987 at the National March on Washington for Gay and Lesbian Rights, 1,920 panels blanketed the National Mall. The basic functions of what would become the largest community art project in the world were therapeutic and performative. Crimp characterized it as the
ritual of mourning, “the private mourning ritual of a person or group involved in making a panel and the collective mourning ritual of visiting the quilt to share that experience with others,” and the spectacle of mourning, “the vast public relations effort to humanize and dignify our losses for those who have not shared them.” The latter also entailed the prospects of AIDS education, prevention, and fund-raising.

As so many critics, including this volume’s contributors, have explained, the rhetorical power of the AIDS Quilt is enacted precisely in the “litany of names” (both seen as well as read aloud as part of the ritual event) and “panels of cloth” that Feinberg cast as reduction. From exiguous gravelike inscriptions to excessive productions reminiscent of the carnivalesque, the panels embody names as signatures, as lives. Richard Mohr wrote, “the represented, lightening-quick, single-frame narratives of the Quilt are . . . probes of distinctness. They target, seek out, and display the named individual’s personality—his center of narrative gravity, the orchestral tone of his being, life as his gesture. The panels are snapshots of the soul as posed in memory.” Magnificent metonymy, memento vitae.

But the panels’ “sheer specificity” and “democratizing effect,” achieved by affording “equal status to all panels regardless of elaboration, style, or uniqueness,” only half accounts for the AIDS Quilt’s strength. The unfolding whole of those striking parts is striking in its own right: the tragic induction of collective evidence exhibited and the sublimity of its awful magnitude. As Peter Hawkins astutely observed:

Private identity is held up as monumental; the intimate stretches as far as the eye can see. In fact, by overdramatizing intimacy, by taking small gestures of domestic grief and multiplying them into the thousands, the Quilt makes a spectacular demonstration of the feminist dictum: the personal is political. . . . the Quilt redescribes the entire nation in terms of the epidemic—it says, America has AIDS. Here sorrow would knit together the social fabric and personal loss to become the common bond of citizenship: we’re all in this together.

Jones’ Quilt enacted in crisis a queer transformation of another dictum: e pluribus unum.

The mourning ritual and spectacle of the AIDS Quilt, with all their
familial and national appeal, however, did not touch everyone, and could not, some believed, adequately confront the epidemic as a health crisis, as a political crisis. Although David Feinberg was at first “blown away by it,” the second time around, despite more tears, he ended up making out on the Quilt with a Californian named Bill, “as an act of social disobedience.” “The textile responses to the AIDS crisis leave me cold,” Feinberg wrote. “I prefer my ACT UP button that says ‘ACT UP, FIGHT BACK, FIGHT AIDS’ and have people on the subway cringe when they read the last word on it.” Feinberg illustrated vividly the prominent activist critique of the Quilt as domesticating and depoliticizing and acquiescing to the epidemic. Anger, not tears, organizing and direct action, not quilting and reading names, should be the response to AIDS grief. While mourners wept on the Mall, Senator Jesse Helms was finalizing his amendment to proposed federal legislation for AIDS funding, a vicious amendment presented only three days after the inaugural display of the Quilt that would “prohibit the use of any funds provided under this ACT . . . to provide AIDS education, information, or prevention materials and activities that promote, encourage, or condone homosexual sexual activities or intravenous use of illegal drugs.” We should not forget that in 1987 ACT UP was also created. Indeed, given their simultaneity and historical significance in response to the epidemic, the AIDS Quilt and ACT UP perhaps should, despite their opposition, always be remembered together.

Nor was the political critique the only critique of the AIDS Quilt. Despite the gender-specific roots of quilting as a cultural practice, and the epicene quality of the panels, some noted the paucity of women represented in the AIDS Quilt, or, put differently, the dominance of attention to gay men. Ironically, others argued that the AIDS Quilt “de-gayed” the epidemic in its attempt at generating wide empathy and reaching out to mainstream America. One version of the objection argued that the AIDS Quilt sanitized gay sex through “lies of omission,” a particularly egregious betrayal given that so many were mourning not only lovers but the very sexual culture that had liberated them. Still others asked, as Marita Sturken powerfully put it, “Is it a privilege to be able to mourn in the middle of an epidemic?” She argued, “much of the rhetoric [of the NAMES Project] is geared specifically at middle-class communities, gay and straight, rather than at inner-city Latino, black, and other poor communities.”
communities affected by AIDS. The rhetoric of healing and redemption may, in fact, be one of privilege. Is the AIDS Quilt the product of only one part of the community of AIDS in the United States—that is, the people that have the time and resources for spiritual growth and mourning?"26

These are pointed and resonant criticisms that rightfully qualified or demystified the AIDS Quilt, and continue to do so. It is important, however, even as we acknowledge these shortcomings and seek their redress, to once again place them and the AIDS Quilt in time. Christopher Capozzola argued, “Despite all its weaknesses, despite all its limits, during the years between 1985 to the mid-1990s, the Quilt managed to resolve those tensions in positive ways. The form of the memorial mattered a great deal: its creation, display, and ultimate meaning were radically inclusive, and its framework of memory was consistently democratic in ways that could encompass its multiple constituencies and their varying definitions of politics.”27 Cleve Jones, in responding to the activist critique, insisted that “the political message is that human life is sacred.”28 This fundamental claim best captures the emotional depth and moral authority that made the AIDS Quilt a transformative epidemic text. As Mohr concluded, “elegy making and mourning are especially worthy activities, for they, perhaps more than anything else, remind us, presses to both consciousness and conscience, why, in a world where suffering regularly dwarfs well-being, life is worth living in the first place. In valorizing, even sacralizing, the mourned person in his individuality and uniqueness, The NAMES Project and elegy in general manifest why the goal of stopping AIDS warrants screaming in the streets and more as means to that end.”29

Today

If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could then better judge what to do, and how to do it.

—Abraham Lincoln, “House Divided Speech,” June 16, 1858

Listen carefully and you can hear a survivor of the first wave of the AIDS epidemic sardonically exclaiming, “Look how far we’ve come!” In the
second of our time passages, I recalled Cleve Jones being “taken aback” by news of the twentieth anniversary. Among the plausible explanations for his momentary disorientation might have been a horrifying recognition that, despite the passing of more than two decades since the first display of the AIDS Quilt, despite the massive death and its personal and cultural aftershocks, the epidemic—the pandemic—persists, stronger than ever, a fiasco of magnificent proportions: global, national, local, individual. Richard Kim’s grim evaluation in 2002, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of AIDS, can be repeated virtually without editing nearly a decade later:

Any assessment of the epidemic was bound to be an indictment, and not the sort we generally like to read about, in which the guilty are absolutely so, and the innocent many and untainted. Any writer willing to connect the dots would conclude that the systemic political response to AIDS has been a signal failure. . . . The current demographics of AIDS, marked as they are by severe economic and racial inequality, were not preordained. AIDS is a preventable and treatable disease, and it exists as it does because it was allowed to unfold this way, through the same kind of gross political negligence that permitted the disease to become an epidemic in the first place.\textsuperscript{30}

According to the UNAIDS/WHO Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic (2008) and CDC HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report (2007), data reveals that in 2007 an estimated 33 million globally were living with HIV, there were 2.7 million new infections, and 2 million AIDS-related deaths. Women accounted for half of all infections. In the United States (estimates according to thirty-four states and five dependent areas), HIV infection increased 15 percent during 2004–2007. African Americans accounted for 51 percent of new infections in 2007. Men who have sex with men (MSM) comprised 53 percent of new cases in 2005, 2006, and 2007. By the end of 2007, 583,298 Americans had died of AIDS in the fifty states and Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{31} Where are we, and whither are we tending?

The AIDS Quilt, too, has grown exponentially since 1987, evidencing at the same time both its success and failure. The NAMES Project reports that as of November 2008 there were over 46,000 panels, 5,789
blocks, and more than 91,000 names in the AIDS Quilt, representing only approximately 17.5 percent of AIDS deaths in the United States. Given these numbers and the 18,000,000 visitors, one would have to conclude that as a ritual of mourning, the AIDS Quilt has thrived remarkably as a rhetorical text. As a spectacle of mourning, however, even granting the $4 million raised for direct services to people with AIDS, the Quilt arguably has flagged or faltered, if we judge it simply with regard to its goals of awareness and prevention.32 In addition to the infection rates surveyed above, we might take note that an estimated one-quarter of people living with HIV do not know that they are infected with the virus.33

The question of empathy also remains open. Despite discourses decrying imbalanced attention to gay men since the beginning of the epidemic, HIV/AIDS still is concentrated in that demographic, noting a rise of 11 percent in infections among MSM between 2001 and 2005, and noting again that the majority of new diagnoses in the United States for 2005–2007 occurred among MSM.34 Crimp’s perspective is not beyond the pale: “That many in our society secretly want us dead is to me beyond question. And one expression of this may be our society’s loving attention to the quilt, which is not only a ritual and representation of mourning but also stunning evidence of mass death of gay men. It would, of course, be unseemly for society to celebrate our deaths openly, but I wonder if the quilt helps make this desire decorous.”35 Further, if we take the current disproportionate rates of infection in communities of color and among women within the contexts of racism, sexism, classism, etc., then the appalling bumper sticker from the first wave of the epidemic remains telling: “AIDS: Killing All the Right People.”36

These familiar binaries, however, are not the only sites of the ongoing divided house of the epidemic. Beginning in 2001 (if not before), a public battle erupted over proprietorship and purpose of the AIDS Quilt when, plagued by debt and desiring to reconfigure its focus in relation to shifting demographics, the NAMES Project moved from San Francisco to Atlanta. A year later, the NAMES Project also revised its relationship with the network of local affiliate chapters, requiring greater centralized control over promotional materials and issuing a ban on local direct-mail fund-raising while at the same time mandating increased responsibility for shipping fees. For reasons both symbolic and financial, nearly a third
of the local chapters disbanded in 2002, including the founding local chapter in San Francisco and one of the largest in Washington, D.C.37

Cleve Jones, who had been on the payroll as founder and spokesperson since he stepped down as director for health reasons in 1990, was also embroiled with his colleagues at the NAMES Project. Jones had criticized the organization for not displaying the AIDS Quilt in full on the National Mall in 2004 to dramatize AIDS as an issue in the presidential election. This largely precipitated his firing by the NAMES Project in 2003. A protracted legal battle ensued between 2004–2006 over Jones’s termination, emotional harm, and possession of 280 panels, or thirty-five blocks, of the AIDS Quilt. In 2007 the NAMES Project claimed that Jones violated the terms of the 2005 settlement by gaining sponsorship of his nonprofit San Francisco Bay Area Friends of the AIDS Memorial Quilt from the Tides Center in San Francisco. As of this writing, it does not appear that panels have returned to San Francisco.38

The larger question is one of purpose and the means to achieve it. Jones seems to believe that the AIDS Quilt must continue to function as a ritual of spectacle in the largest sense, namely as a sublime rhetoric that makes magnitude apparent to all in deeply resonant national spaces, most specifically in Washington, D.C. He also has criticized the “warehousing” of the AIDS Quilt in Atlanta instead of taking it to the “front line of activism,” to “hot zone[s]” of the epidemic.39 In speaking of continued infection rates among young gay men, for example, he observed in 2003, “What a horrible condemnation of our culture that all these years after people like Martin Luther King and Harvey Milk gave their lives, we are still producing these children, who when they look in the mirror do not see what we see when we look into their eyes. They don’t see the beauty. They don’t see the promise of the future. They see nothing. . . . And people want to say it’s not political.”40 In short, Jones argued in early 2007, the AIDS Quilt “is not intended as a passive memorial.”41

The NAMES Project believes that it remains an active agent in the fight, on the frontlines—indeed, on the many fronts, demographically speaking, especially in the African American and Latino communities—of the fight against the AIDS epidemic. Executive director Julie Rhoad responded to criticism by observing that, although lacking the resources to display the Quilt in its entirety, more than half of the panel blocks were
The Mourning After

displayed in local communities each year 2004–2006, dwarfing display totals at the end of the AIDS Quilt’s time in San Francisco. Moreover, the NAMES Project created the Historically Black Colleges and Universities Initiative, with these stated goals:

- Raising awareness of HIV/AIDS as a public health issue that disproportionately affects African-American young people
- Complementing existing HIV prevention programs with The Quilt’s proven efficacy as an HIV prevention tool and through the leadership of campus peer educators
- Encouraging African-Americans and youth to access HIV testing and treatment
- Promoting AIDS Memorial panel making within the African-American community in order to bring communities together, promote remembrance and healing, and to address the silence around AIDS by facilitating informed dialogue

Other programs include the Communities of Faith Display Initiative and the National Youth Education Program, which “brings the Quilt to youth around the country in schools and community organizations, raising awareness of HIV/AIDS in a context-sensitive way that is found in the displays of The Quilt that we curate every day.” Clearly, then, the NAMES Project would argue that it continues to thrive both as a ritual of mourning and a spectacle of mourning. Authors in this volume offer powerful evidence that this is so.

Still others, especially more radical AIDS activists, continue to question the AIDS Quilt as a movement tactic. As Michael Petrelis observed, “The quilt was very effective in the late ’80s and early ’90s for AIDS awareness. On the other hand, there’s hundreds and thousands of people that need a housing subsidy, just trying to keep a roof over their head. Should we be putting our time into another vigil? I don’t know.” Knowing where we are and whither we are tending remains a conflict about causes and motives, means and vision. As Crimp rightly suggested many years ago: “Activist antagonism to mourning hinges, in part, on how AIDS is interpreted, or rather, where the emphasis is laid, on whether the crisis is seen to be a natural, accidental catastrophe—a disease syndrome that has
simply struck at this time in this place—or as the result of gross political negligence or mendacity—an epidemic that was allowed to happen.”

Tomorrow

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain.

—Abraham Lincoln, “Gettysburg Address,” November 19, 1863

Vito Russo’s most remembered discourse was, in its own right, Lincoln-esque: “AIDS is a test of who we are as a people. And when future generations ask what we did in the war we’re going to have to tell them that we are out here fighting. And we have to leave a legacy to the generations of people who would come after us.” One difference here, of course, is tense, and therefore audience. For Lincoln, those in the present answered to those already fallen; Russo and his compatriots answered to those not yet born. Both men, however, fought for life in freedom. Neither man lived to see the culmination of that vision.

Another difference seems to be that of memory. In Lincoln’s case the performance of memory is thwarted by the task at hand. For Russo, the performance of memory is activated as essentially the task at hand: “remember, that some day, the AIDS crisis is going to be over.” David Román offers an insightful reading of Russo’s call to memory:

Russo asks his audience to remember essentially a belief that has no basis in historical fact but is determined by what can only be understood as the political will of the people whom he addresses. He hopes people will align around this shared feeling, which will motivate and inspire change. . . . [He] also imagines that AIDS will be remembered. It runs on the presumption that the historical archives of AIDS and its activism will be preserved so that future generations will know what transpired and how “a brave group of people stood up and fought and
in some cases died,” sparing them the terrible reality of what Russo and others experienced throughout the early to late 1980s.47

Russo’s future perfect vision—“a day when we can stop adding panels to this quilt and put it away, as a symbol of a terrible thing that happened and that’s now over”—is simultaneously heartening and wrenching given our retrospective location. But the presumptions Román discerns, namely that an archive of AIDS, specifically the Quilt, should be preserved and mobilized as a usable history, serve well as prompts and provocations as we imagine our own versions of the future time of the epidemic. As Sarah Brophy put it, “What we are brought to bear witness to in viewing the quilt is a strange archive, one in which melancholic incorporation (and its attendant disrespect for boundaries) intermingles with more nostalgic tendencies, and with an idealized connection across gender, sexuality, and desire, as well as across familial and national structures.”48 Or we might put it, as does Roger Hallas, in terms of an “archival imperative”: “The question of the archive is thus in the end not whether it succeeds in preserving the past from oblivion but how the past that eventually emerges from it can potentially produce a revelatory historical consciousness of our present.”49

Within contemporary contexts of the pandemic, it is important to ask, as do the authors in the last section of this volume, whether AIDS memory, embodied in the Quilt, is boon or bane to the ongoing struggle against the disease, and how so. One could reasonably claim that, despite the ongoing spread of HIV, the conditions Jeff Nunokawa described have expired: “The understated, understood, remedial urgency of efforts of remembrance such as the NAMES Project, efforts of remembrance that emerge from the gay community itself, describes a pressure that persistently attends the work of remembering such casualties, a pressure to mark deaths that the majority culture is simply not disposed to notice.”50 While the majority culture hasn’t changed in its indifference, the disposition of the gay community in particular seems to have changed with the dissipation of that sense of urgency. Both physically and temporally, and consequentially, AIDS has been invented as “chronic.” Therefore, perhaps AIDS has been rendered, in a flattened sense, chronological, and perhaps memory work is the morbid lot of those complicit in the death
narratives that contemporary HIV rhetorics of manageability, longevity, and health strive to displace and dispel.

Although I fully embrace queer disruption of all defeatist, disciplinary, and discriminatory discourses that have constituted AIDS since its inception, as well as champion those discourses of living that have innumerable beneficial material effects, I also strongly endorse, in various forms, the remembrance, legacy, and archive that Russo bequeathed as obligation. We might consider here memory as ongoing political will as well as the politics of AIDS remembrance. Put differently, “The Quilt embodies a consciousness not just of the political nature of commemoration, but of the political potential of these acts as well.”51 As a letter on the AIDS Quilt suggests: “By the time this letter is read to you, I will have gone on to my new life. . . . In the future, when you look at the history books that will be written about AIDS, you will find that one of the highlights of the book will be a chapter on one of the good results of the disease—that is—humanity became more compassionate. From that compassion the world became a better place. And you, my friends, will be the history makers.”52 The voice from the Quilt resonates as we reflect on Judith Butler’s observation: “If we stay with the sense of loss, are we left feeling only passive and powerless, as some might fear? Or are we, rather, returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another? . . . To grieve, and to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself.”53

The Quilt’s ongoing political potential will be activated by embodied memories in various forms of mobility, as artifacts and ongoing individual and cultural performances, as well as by its influence on other commemorative modes and artifacts, some seemingly unrelated to the AIDS Quilt. In constituting memory as ongoing political will, its materialization and enactment, I have in mind the necessity of AIDS memory, queer memory and history, as prolegomenon and provenance to all GLBTQ activism, common grounds of GLBTQ communities. This is a renewal of Simon Watney’s rally cry from 1994: “When so few value us in life, it is especially important to record our everyday experiences of the epidemic from the perspective of those who cannot simply go away. We must define this
history, or it will not survive us.”54 Likewise, we must define ourselves in terms of that history; we will not survive without it. As Watney wrote elsewhere,

Whilst martyrology is distasteful, especially if it lends a posthumous sense of purpose to the accidents of epidemic disease, it is none the less salutary to record and recall the political history of the HIV epidemic. . . . For if we accept that gay identity is not fixed or given, but a complex historical result, it becomes apparent that it is at the level of popular understanding and memory of the epidemic that gay identity will be re-shaped and re-directed.55

Such a project would emulate what Lucas Hilderbrand, in his discussion of ACT UP memory, including James Wentzy’s commemorative video Fight Back, Fight AIDS (2002), calls “retroactivism.” Hilderbrand advocates “intergenerational nostalgia,” a form of cultural memory that “accounts for generative historical fascination, of imagining, feeling, and drawing from history.”56 In a similar vein, Alexandra Juhasz observes that the mission of what she calls “queer archive activism” is “not merely to get stuck in remembering AIDS images but rather to relodge those frozen memories in contemporary contexts so that they, and perhaps we, can be reanimated.”57 Though the Quilt might not fit with Hilderbrand and Juhasz’s desire for nostalgia’s mobilization of more radical queer community, the potential of such memory work is broadly applicable and inspiring, for as Hilderbrand concludes, it “not only records a social movement but also regenerates it.”58

This imperative entails a simultaneous interrogation of history and memory that results, for instance, in an intersectional account of the past instead of one that is exclusively or predominantly gay. Following Kyra Pearson’s query in this volume about how to have history in an epidemic, such an interrogation would result in rethinking not only the relationship between AIDS history and the present, but also AIDS history and its preceding pasts. The damage done by what Christopher Castiglia has called “counternostalgia,” or “a look back in fury at the sexual ‘excesses’ of the immature, pathological, and diseased pre-AIDS generation,” can only be undone by memory work that might reconfigure individual and
collective shame, rage, and other feelings. Provocatively, a number of theorists have recently espoused deep exploration, embrace, and application of “queer negativity.” As Heather Love concludes, “the question really is not whether feelings such as grief, regret, and despair have a place in transformative politics: it would in fact be impossible to imagine transformative politics without these feelings. Nor is the question how to cultivate hope in the face of despair, since such calls tend to demand the replacement of despair with hope. Rather, the question that faces us is how to make a future backward enough that even the most reluctant among us might want to live there.” At the same time, we would do well to join Hilderbrand in resisting an exclusively traumatic framework, acknowledging and encouraging instead an “affective spectrum and its potential implications for subsequent generations.”

We might contemplate in relationship to the Quilt, for instance, the late activist Michael Lynch’s ire in the early 1980s at gay men chastising and policing sexual culture, who in his judgment sought “to rip apart the very promiscuous fabric that knits the gay male community together and that, in its democratic anarchism, defies state regulation of our sexuality.” We might also engage in countermemories that extend a tradition of altering the terms of the death narrative, one instantiation of which would entail the juxtaposition of Quilt panels against a revival version of ACT UP’s installation “Let the Record Show . . .” featuring a backdrop of the Nuremberg trials with foregrounded headstones for Ronald Reagan, Jerry Falwell, Jesse Helms, William F. Buckley, as well as contemporary homophobic, AIDSphobic bigots. Or a visual display featuring familiar images of lovers grieving at the Quilt juxtaposed with the image of Nancy Reagan weeping as she rested her hand on her husband’s coffin. And, of course, we could continue to make panels for the Quilt, for those recently deceased and for those long gone but unaccounted for, especially for those who for too long have been underrepresented.

Finally, let me reflect on Russo’s hope that there will be “a day when we can stop adding panels to this quilt and put it away.” Although the panels continue to accumulate unabated in only partial representation of the epidemic, the Quilt has, in a sense, been put away. I neither affirm nor deny Cleve Jones’s claim that the AIDS Quilt has been “warehoused.” But storage of historical texts across time passages does constitute an
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archive. Sturken early on registered the pragmatic difficulties in preserving the AIDS Quilt and the adequacy of digital images of the panels. Those important difficulties persist. I offer instead a different perspective, namely that archives are always political spaces. Important questions regarding access, interpretation, and display must always be asked of the NAMES Project archive, even as we recognize its valued stewardship. As I have said before, “The archive . . . should rightly be understood not as a passive receptacle for historical documents and their ‘truths,’ or a benign research space, but rather as a dynamic site of rhetorical power.” We should remember, too, that although archives, like memory and history, are deployed (and indeed must be deployed) less often for their own sake than for their utility in the present and future, those archived panels are still lives and should be remembered in relation to those important projects giving voice to people living with HIV/AIDS. And we should still remember what it means to mourn: “Mourning, like love, is a vector of attention pointed from the moral agent to the particularity of another person. The proper focus of moral concern in mourning is he who is mourned, not he who does the mourning. Only through and in the mourner’s sorrow does the missing of the dead really count for anything.”

The Essays

In the pages that follow, we find ten superb essays that embody and engage and interrogate the AIDS Quilt. Like the Quilt itself, no single account, or even limited set of interpretations, can fully convey this richly diverse and complicated epidemic text. Indeed, if some of these authors are correct, we never experience the same Quilt twice; we alter with each encounter. Nevertheless, these insightful essays give us yards and yards of materiality and memory to ponder, feel, challenge, and act upon as the next decades of the AIDS Quilt unfold.

Although the Quilt is by design queerly organized, which is to say without prescribed entrances, routes, barriers, or exits, I risk betraying the text here by grouping the essays according to three thematic topoi so as to facilitate the reader’s engagement. At the same time, the beauty and brilliance of the essays, as will become clear, is that they, like the Quilt,
exceed any stable categorization, conceptually and emotionally circulating throughout the other groupings, through each of the other essays, in the volume.

The first section I label “Emergence” because its two essays explore the contexts and traditions out of and in response to which the Quilt was conceived, formed, mobilized, coalesced, stitched, resisted, orchestrated, performed, mediated, and expanded in its formative years. Most prominent and complex of these contexts was the AIDS epidemic itself—viral, visceral, and volatile in transmogrifying bodies, discourses, and spaces constitutive of selves and others in every sense. But the epidemic must be considered in relation to the many other conditions of Reagan’s America. Here too we discover the formative rhetorical patterns and swatches that bound up and expressed and transformed lost lives, lives at the limen.

Origin stories, such as that told by Cleve Jones in this volume’s prologue, are never the whole story, compelling though they may be. Every beginning text is indebted intertextually to that which came before, and seldom can we predict how that text, in turn, will be transformed by what comes after it. Carole Blair and Neil Michel, in their essay, “The AIDS Memorial Quilt and the Contemporary Culture of Public Commemoration,” place the AIDS Quilt in the historical context of collective memory at the time of its emergence. More specifically, they place the AIDS Quilt “in conversation” with its predecessor, the touchstone Vietnam Veterans Memorial, in order to discover how these rhetorical texts departed from commemorative norms of invention, representation, and reception. Blair and Michel understand this moment as a critical juncture in contemporary public commemoration, with the numerous commemorative sites that followed, particularly the Oklahoma City and 9/11 memorials, both enabled and disabled by anxieties and tensions in the AIDS Quilt’s rhetoric.

From our historical vantage, it is perhaps difficult for people who did not live through the first wave of the epidemic to understand that, as Gust A. Yep observes in his essay, “The Politics of Loss and Its Remains in Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt,” those lost to AIDS were culturally and politically constituted as unreal, abject, ungrievable bodies. In recognizing this dimension of loss with Yep, we see that it constitutes, then as well as now, multiple social, political, and aesthetic relations.
Such relationships of loss, he explains, are manifested in its bodily remains, such as subjectivities; spatial remains, such as representation; and ideal remains, such as knowledges, across time. Yep illustrates this relationship between loss and its remains in the extraordinary, award-winning 1989 documentary *Common Threads*, a film which beautifully produced bodily, spatial, and ideal remains of five lives lost to AIDS. Through his reading of the documentary, Yep not only reveals the politics of loss and its remains during the epidemic’s ascendancy, but also identifies for us the ways in which those remains might meaningfully haunt us still.

I term the second section “Movement.” In one sense this designation is temporal insofar as its span stretches from the first wave of the epidemic to the present; the approach here is generally diachronic. But more significantly, movement signifies the emotional, intellectual, moral, political, theoretical awakenings, rendings, epiphanies, traversals and transitions, tensions and reverberations that the Quilt has engendered. And continues to engender. Noteworthy here is the effort to essay the Quilt in the form of the Quilt, the manifest desire to empanel oneself, the deeply resonant reflections of walking and stitching this text, and the engagements with others this text inspires and provokes. We are offered vivid proof of the claims that the Quilt is experiential, material, performative. Movement too names the political will, political judgment, activist impulse, and action imagined, fomented, and enacted in these essays.

As many who have contemplated the AIDS Quilt point out, the intellectual and emotional experience of its display derives from the radical particularity of the panels, an experience that isn’t mapped but inevitably reroutes those who encounter it. In that spirit, Kevin Michael DeLuca, Christine Harold, and Kenneth Rufo provide us with a unique experience of their “Q.U.I.L.T.: A Patchwork of Reflections.” Through their wide-ranging “thought panels,” we process loss directly, tour the NAMES Project headquarters in Atlanta, engage the AIDS Quilt as a representative failure, as public, as sanctuary, as a spectacular sight, as a disorienting surrealist response to funereal aesthetics, as sublime, as cloth, as a quilting point, as an archive. The creativity of this critical endeavor is in its own right a memorial to the AIDS Quilt, even as its deconstruction troubles what we thought we knew about this text, its meanings and promises.
Brian L. Ott, Eric Aoki, and Greg Dickinson, in “Collage/Montage as Critical Practice, Or How to “Quilt”/Read Postmodern Text(ile)s,” also “come together” to enact the Quilt by creating a collage/montage of “panels” that bespeak its experiential, material, performative, and theoretical dimensions and force. Striking in these reflections is the sense of engagement, with the Quilt and with each other, and of their interanimation; or, like the Quilt itself, according to their account, they engage in a meaningful “coperformance,” “a critical performance that is equally fragmented and unified, communal and individual.” After an orientation to the complex manifold history and practice of quilting, Aoki’s autoethnography movingly exhibits his intersecting professional and personal efforts to “make peace with the Quilt,” to stitch life together again in the wake of his partner Stephen’s death from AIDS, and the challenges of stitching Stephen’s memory. Dickinson focuses on the material embodiments of walking the Quilt, memorial acts of public (un)stitching of the body politic in a particular “location.” He provocatively claims that “the Quilt is a founding mnemonic of late modernity,” an experience and constitution of past and present that is “nodal, networked, nomadic, embodied, performative.” Ott understands the Quilt as a “living theory” of the text in the Barthesian sense of its ineffability, its radical uniqueness as always a “live performance,” its inducement to ecstatic and disorienting experience, its production. “To experience The Quilt,” Ott writes, “is, if only temporarily, to unravel—to come undone.” Put differently, such a powerful encounter is momentarily, in a “flash of experience,” to be unfettered and thus to reimagine, perhaps to reconfigure, self and community.

Evident in these panels, as in Quilt panels, is not only deep intellectual engagement but also trenchant emotional encounters. Jeffrey A. Bennett conceptualizes this dimension in his essay, “A Stitch in Time: Public Emotionality and the Repertoire of Citizenship.” Rejecting the division between reason and emotion, Bennett explores the ways in which the Quilt’s emotionality offered a meaningful and inventive counterresponse to the rational official discourses and silences that attended and constituted the epidemic in its early years. Moreover, the Quilt as a “peripatetic site of public emotionality” produced “repertoires of public citizenship”: emotional performative embodiments across time and space that have engendered stranger relationality, knowledge and memory, political
judgment and participation, and moral action—catharsis, belonging, bonding, and empowerment. Although the Quilt’s entextualization has in some ways fallen “prey to hegemonic forces,” namely discourses of neoliberalism, it has also resisted them. “Its incomplete narrative,” Bennett concludes, “structures the voids that those engaged with the Quilt must fill and prohibits its therapeutic qualities from eliminating possibilities of change.”

A final traversal, spatial in a broader sense and temporally most exigent, Daniel C. Brouwer’s essay, “From San Francisco to Atlanta and Back Again: Ideologies of Mobility in the AIDS Quilt’s Search for a Homeland,” focuses on the multifarious formations of mobility: the power, politics, and ideology of home, homeland, travel, tourism, and other instantiations of place and movement. From the beginning, the AIDS Quilt powerfully subverted the epidemiological constructions of movement by its communally affirming mobility. Indeed, as Brouwer observes, the AIDS Quilt functioned best through its “promiscuous mobility.” However, the AIDS Quilt’s move to Atlanta, what Brouwer calls a “controversial re-routing,” and the subsequent firing of Cleve Jones, created a different politics of mobility, one related to notions of home and homeland and inflected especially by race and gender. Here Brouwer discovers “new combinations of memory, fantasy, people, and place as it unsettled long-standing combinations of those elements.”

The final section I label “Transformation.” Though these essays share with work in the previous section many of the elements of movement, they also chart distinct trajectories into the future. They most directly contemplate the peril and potential of remembering, memorializing, and archiving the Quilt. Does the Quilt still function as a means of survival? For whom? How might it be retrofitted to function as such? Has the Quilt become monumental, which is to say hegemonic, at the expense of more vibrant activist modes? Does remembering the Quilt displace other, equally powerful or perhaps superior, memory work? What are the wages of history, memory, in an epidemic without end?

In “Rhetorics of Loss and Living: Adding New Panels to the AIDS Quilt as an Act of Eulogy,” Bryant Keith Alexander seeks to thwart the dominant AIDS death narrative, as well as the inadequate representation of African American gay men in AIDS history and memory, through the
ethnoperformative texts of “mourning subjects.” While acknowledging the historical significance of the AIDS Quilt, Alexander “resists the historicizing of lives still living in hope,” the foreclosure of the experiences of those yet to be, perhaps never to be, quilted. Through what he calls “short stories” or “counternarratives”—powerful narratives including his own reflection on his brother’s death from AIDS and the voices of Black gay PWAs [persons with AIDS]—Alexander envisions and enacts “rhetorics of loss and living,” a reconfiguration of the genre of eulogy, a “resistant archival process,” that mediates (“ruptures” and “sutures” by “stand between persons”) between past and present, presence and absence, individual and community, grief and political action. These narratives constitute the AIDS Quilt as “performance of possibilities,” functioning “like new panels” to reinvigorate the NAMES Project as a transformed discursive space, political modality, and museum.

It is worth noting again that 2012 will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of ACT UP. The starkly different approaches these organizations adopted in response to the epidemic produced tensions and debates among various communities that have been exceptionally illuminating. Erin J. Rand, in her essay “Repeated Remembrance: Commemorating the AIDS Quilt and Resuscitating the Mourned Subject,” revives and extends this significant engagement by participating in what she astutely calls our “doubled commemoration,” commemorating a memorial. Rand examines the ways in which the AIDS Quilt helped to produce gay men as “mourned subjects,” those who gained subjectivity, which did not previously exist, by virtue of being codified as those dying of AIDS. Such subjectivity, generated through grief, granted a certain measure of national social recognition and tolerance of this group. However, Rand questions the agency afforded by the constitution of the mourned subject, arguing that instead we should look carefully at anger as a productive alternative response that achieves progress through activism, an alternative embodied in the demos and political funerals of ACT UP. As we ourselves repeat the ritual of memorialization, Rand asks again: mourning or militancy?

Finally and fittingly, Kyra Pearson, in “How to Have History in an Epidemic,” queries time—that is, the discourses of history in relation to the rhetorical relevance and constitution of the ongoing epidemic as embodied in and engaged by the Quilt. Or, as she provocatively asks, “What
might it mean to have a history in an epidemic? How might we historicize an epidemic that is now within Western nations considered a ‘managable,’ chronic condition (at least for those who can afford treatment)? And why might a sense of the past be important now?” Arguing for the centrality of temporality to AIDS activism, Pearson situates the unfolding of the Quilt across time and space within the contexts of inescapable precedent and ephemerality. The Quilt resists both of those powerful “invocations of the past,” Pearson argues, by virtue of its functioning as an “artifact of progression” rather than a memorial to progress. As her diachronic analysis of media coverage of the Quilt suggests, however, the irony of this artifact of progression is that it has thus become vulnerable to the charge of obsolescence, mired in a struggle over activist meaning and value. Shaped by time and timing, ambivalence about the Quilt should remind us all that kairos is about the past as much as the present and future.

NOTES

121–122. Elmer Ellsworth was a dashing and gifted young soldier whom Lincoln had admired and befriended in Springfield, Illinois, between 1859 and 1861. Upon taking the presidency, Lincoln brought Ellsworth with him to Washington, rapidly and pointedly arranging for his placement in the office of the chief clerk of the War Department, then a month later his promotion to adjutant and inspector general of militia for the United States. In the first days of the war, Ellsworth knew that a Confederate flag flying over a hotel in Alexandria, Virginia, distressed Lincoln, who could see it from across the Potomac. While on a nearby mission on May 24, 1861, Ellsworth took his men into the hotel to seize the flag and was killed in the action. Lincoln’s grief was severe, so severe, in fact, that his composure more than once failed him in sobbing waves as he attempted to conduct official business. He twice visited Ellsworth’s body at the Naval Yard and arranged for funeral services to be held at the Executive Mansion. Ellsworth’s death was also precipitous militarily, as David Donald observes, “Up to this point Lincoln had favored delay, but he now ordered an advance against the Confederate army.” David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Random House, 1995), 306. See also Tripp, *Intimate World*, 109–124; Ruth Painter Randall, *Colonel Elmer Ellsworth: A Biography of Lincoln’s Friend and First Hero of the Civil War* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960).


9. Yingling explained, “research suggests a ‘natural history’ of the virus (ten-year-plus incubation periods); gay and lesbian rhetoric links the fight against AIDS to Stonewall and to the entire question of gay and lesbian history; PWA [person with AIDS] rhetoric states that the ethics of our historical moment will be judged by its response to AIDS; journalists and experts alike project ‘the next ten years’ or rehearse the present and past in a narrative behind which always hovers a specter of apocalypse in which AIDS functions as the demonic counterpart to the beneficent ‘end of history’ coded in myths of America.” Thomas Yingling, “AIDS in America: Postmodern Governance, Identity, and Experience,” in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 297–298; Cindy Patton, *Globalizing AIDS* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 6.


11. Altman, AIDS in the Mind of America, 29.
14. For background on Jones, see Cleve Jones, with Jeff Dawson, Stitching a Revolution: The Making of an Activist (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000); Randy Shilts, The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk (New York: St. Martin’s, 1982); Shilts, And the Band Played On; Clendinen and Nagourney, Out for Good.


19. Among the many valuable analyses, Crimp best articulates ambivalence toward the AIDS Quilt. See “Mourning and Militancy” and “The Spectacle of Mourning.” In the latter, for instance, he concluded, “In an epidemic that didn’t have to happen, and whose continuing to this day to spread virtually unabated is the result of political neglect or outright mendacity, every death is unacceptable. And yet death itself can never finally not be accepted. We have to accept death to continue to live. But the difference, and the resulting ambivalence, is precisely this: the difference between those of us who must learn to accept these deaths and those who still find these deaths acceptable. And who can say whether or not the Names Project quilt might cut both ways.” Crimp, “The Spectacle of Mourning,” 202.

20. Feinberg, *Queer and Loathing*, 37–38, 184. Deborah Gould’s study suggests that Feinberg’s reaction was consonant with ACT UP’s organizational response to the Quilt: “As part of its mobilization for the FDA action, ACT UP passed out a leaflet at the quilt showing. One side blared, ‘SHOW YOUR ANGER TO THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED MAKE THE QUILT POSSIBLE: OUR GOVERNMENT.’” Text on the reverse read, “The Quilt helps us remember our lovers, relatives, and friends who have died during the past eight years. These people have died from a virus. But they have been killed by our government’s neglect and inaction. . . . More than 40,000 people have died from AIDS. . . . Before this Quilt grows any larger, turn your grief into anger. Turn your anger into action. TURN THE POWER OF THE QUILT INTO ACTION.” Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 225–226.


32. I want to point out that throughout this volume statistical assessments of the toll of AIDS vary. This “inconsistency” is, on one hand, not uncommon among multiple reputable sources; on the other hand, it strikes me as an important rhetorical effect of the ongoing political struggle over the signification of AIDS.


35. Quoted by Cleve Jones in the documentary *Then and Now* on the Common Threads DVD.


40. Quoted by Cleve Jones in Then and Now.
42. Christiansen, “A Rip in the Quilt”; McKinley, “A Changing Battle.”
45. Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy,” 133.
48. Russo, “Why We Fight,” in Common Threads. It is important to note that Russo's vision has been remembered from multiple historical locations, with differing effects. Not long after Russo's death, Douglas Crimp wrote, “Vito's death painfully demonstrated to many AIDS activists that the rhetoric of hope we invented and depended upon—a rhetoric of ‘living with AIDS,’ in which ‘AIDS is not a death sentence,’ but rather ‘a chronic manageable illness’—was becoming difficult to sustain. I don't want to minimize the possibility that anyone's death might result in such a loss of hope for someone, and, moreover, within a two-week period of Vito's death, four other highly visible members of ACT UP New York also died, a cumulative loss for us that was all but unbearable. But I think many of us had a special investment in Vito's survival, not because he was so beloved, but because, as a resolute believer in his own survival, and a highly visible and articulate fighter for his and other's survival, he fully embodied that hope” (Crimp, “Right On, Girlfriend!,” 303). Brophy, Witnessing AIDS, 49.


52. Sturken, “Conversations with the Dead,” 217.


Russo, “Why We Fight,” in *Common Threads.*

Sturken, “Conversations with the Dead,” 218.


Mohr, “Text(ile),” 120.