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**Alien Sex Club: Educating audiences about continuing rates of
HIV transmission using art and design**

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**Alien Sex Club:
Educating audiences about continuing rates
of HIV transmission using art and design.**

John Walter

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Abstract

Alien Sex Club is a practice based PhD that addresses current modes of representation of HIV in art, which grows out of the minimalist aesthetic developed during the earlier part of the AIDS crisis by artists such as Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Today however, it is acknowledged that HIV is an interconnected web of problems that should be represented in a holistic way. Rates of HIV transmission are increasing among gay men in the West. HIV is no longer a life threatening illness due to the availability of highly effective antiretroviral drugs. A resulting decrease in the perception of risk, leading to condom fatigue, unprotected sex and recreational drug use may be some of a number of factors that are contributing to the increase in transmissions.

Despite changes in the cultural, social and scientific context of HIV, artistic representations of the subject have remained the same as those originated before effective treatment was available. In this PhD, I use art and architecture and draw from contemporary scientific and political approaches in ways that differ from previous modes of representation, to raise new questions about HIV.

Alien Sex Club seeks to re-politicise art as an arena for addressing HIV by mobilising a range of visual and aesthetic genres in a curated installation. This take the form of a cruise maze that addresses the complexity of contemporary HIV problems in an academic context. It makes use of spatial design and a maximalist aesthetic to update the representation of HIV. It transposes knowledge about HIV from science, sociology and philosophy into a visual art practice. It uses live art in the form of hospitality and fortune telling in order to question the existing conventions of the art gallery and engage audiences to consider HIV in new ways. It uses autoethnography, a qualitative research method drawn from the social sciences to theorise the methodology of its making. The installation is used as a test site for gathering data of audience responses, which are subjected to textual analysis.

In these ways, Alien Sex Club operates as a counter discourse to the prevailing minimalist representations of HIV. The PhD generates knowledge about how to educate audiences on continuing rates of HIV transmission and extends understandings of the nature of the artist as activist.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Definitions

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome: the result of prolonged untreated HIV infection.
AIDS crisis	The period from 1981 until today since the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic.
ART	Antiretroviral therapy – treatment for HIV.
Bareback	Unprotected anal sex i.e. without a condom.
Bottom	Slang for receptive sexual partner in anal intercourse.
Bugchaser	An HIV negative person looking to get infected with HIV.
CD4 cell	White blood cell used to protect the body against infection, attacked by HIV.
CD4 count	Amount of CD4 cells found in the blood per cubic millimetre.
Cottage	Slang for a toilet known to be a cruising ground for sex between men, also known as a tea rooms in the USA.
Gallows humour	Laughter in the face of death.
Giftgiver	An HIV positive person looking to infect someone who is not infected with the virus.
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus.
Insertive	In sexual intercourse between men – the insertive partner.
MSM	A term from sexual health to describe men who have sex with men i.e. inclusive of whether or not they identify as gay.
Negligible viral load	An individual with a viral load measuring 50 counts per cubic millimetre or below.
Pentimenti	In painting the build up of texture by accumulated paint, which has dried and been painted over with a fresh layer showing the texture of a previous layer.
POCT	Point of care testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.
Polari	1950's gay male slang in the UK.
PrEP	Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis: prevention against HIV.
PWAs	People with AIDS, an early social movement during the AIDS

	crisis.
Receptive	In sexual intercourse between men – the receptive partner.
Scumble	In painting the translucent over-painting of an existing layer letting the previous one show through but obscured.
Sero-concordant	Meaning in a sexual relationship when both partners share the same HIV status; either both negative or both positive.
Sero-conversion	A term that refers to the presence of HIV antibodies in the blood showing the existence of HIV.
Sero-dissonant	Meaning in a sexual relationship when one partner is HIV positive and the other is HIV negative.
Sero-sorting	Choosing sexual partners based on their HIV status.
Strategic Positioning	Choosing sexual position in bareback sex based on educated risk e.g. being the bottom is the riskier position, as there is more chance of being infected than being the top (see p101).
Syndemic	Multiple pandemics simultaneously occurring e.g. HIV, hepatitis and syphilis. May also refer to cultural factors.
THT	Terrence Higgins Trust.
Top	Slang for insertive sexual partner in anal intercourse.
Undetectable viral load	No copies of the virus can be detected n.b. this does not mean that HIV is not present but that levels are so low they do not show up in an HIV test.
Versatile	In sexual intercourse between men – an individual who is both the insertive and receptive partner.
Viral load	Amount of HIV in the blood per cubic millimetre.

Introduction

There is a crisis of representation surrounding HIV. Rates of HIV transmission are increasing among gay men in the West (Aghaizu et al. 2013). Artistic representations of HIV have remained the same as those originated before effective treatment was available despite medical, cultural and social changes affecting the virus. Alien Sex Club (which I will refer to in abbreviated form as ASC) researches how using spatial design and a maximalist aesthetic can update the representation of HIV. Art and architecture can be used to raise questions about social subjects such as HIV in ways that differ from or add to scientific and political approaches. The PhD moves my own artistic practice into the context of architecture in order to create new representations of HIV. Current depictions of HIV grow out of a tradition that was developed during the earlier part of the AIDS crisis in which artists such as Felix Gonzalez-Torres had addressed the subject using Minimalism. Social, cultural and scientific changes have occurred in relation to HIV since the early 1990s that have not yet been fully addressed by visual culture. Art has a part to play in helping communicate information about increasing rates of HIV transmission among gay men in the West and posing questions to audiences about how this could be prevented. ASC aims to intervene in and update the existing representation of HIV in visual art using an immersive installation to curate a provocative new artwork. The research investigates historical and contemporary representations of HIV in visual art and the artistic context against which ASC will be interpreted. The PhD transposes knowledge about HIV from science, sociology and philosophy within visual art; I draw on the latest scientific knowledge about how the virus is transmitted, replicates, is treated and could be prevented; I address the culture of meeting strangers for sex (known as cruising) and the role this plays in the risk of HIV transmission, and I establish a typology of spaces associated with cruising that includes the public toilet, the bathhouse and digital spaces such as smartphones. The PhD uses a large-scale public installation as a mechanism to gather responses to a new way of thinking about and representing HIV. The PhD is undertaken by practice but questions the standard self-reflective approach to practice-based research by using the installation to gather data about responses to its representation of HIV. I analyse this data in order to draw out the differences

between ASC and previous representations of the subject and what this might mean for art, HIV and society.

The aims of the PhD are firstly to educate audiences about HIV, secondly to challenge existing representations of HIV in visual art and thirdly to question the role of the artist as activist. I research the culture of cruising and transmission risk as a series of interconnected problems associated with the urban environment that require addressing simultaneously. The research equips audiences with the vocabulary for thinking about, discussing and understanding HIV as a web of interconnecting problems. There is a paradoxical relationship between HIV and treatment for the virus known as highly effective antiretroviral therapy (ART); the existence of ART may be helping to encourage sexual transmission risks that result in increasing rates of HIV. By looking at the structures that facilitate sexual transmission risk one may be able to intervene in the problem. In addition to ART the factors influencing the problem may include the architecture of sex environments such as gay bathhouses, the invisible architecture of the Internet and smartphone cruising apps such as Grindr, sexual slang, recreational drug use, body dysmorphia, condom fatigue, serosorting (choosing sexual partners based on their HIV status), bugchasing and giftgiving (seeking out HIV positive partners to infect you if you are HIV negative or the inverse) and homophobia. In the quest to change people's behaviour, visual art could play a role in educating audiences about the factors contributing to continuing rates of HIV transmission, which in turn may help reduce rates of transmission.

Research Questions

There are two key questions behind the research. The first being: what aesthetic practices can be mobilised to address HIV in the context of art? This means looking at the precedent for addressing HIV in art and questioning the prevailing aesthetic positions on the subject. It also means looking outside art at other

disciplines that address HIV as a subject – primarily biomedical science – in order to consider new modes of representation that could be brought into art. This question can also be broken down into subsidiary parts. Firstly, how can a maximalist aesthetic be employed to innovate within the existing representation of HIV in visual culture? My research establishes Minimalism as the standard aesthetic approach for engaging in discussion of HIV in visual culture and seeks to critique this alignment by using an opposing maximalist aesthetic. Secondly, further questions are provoked that include how can painting be used to develop a new visual syntax for thinking about and discussing HIV? The installation can be viewed as an enormous folding painting (or polyptych) in many parts that occupies a scale more typical of architecture. Thirdly, the research asks how live art can be used to engage audiences in thinking about HIV? The installation employs a number of performative elements, which dislodge the conventions of the art gallery in an attempt to remove the fear surrounding the subject of HIV for audiences. Fourthly, the project asks how spatial design can be used to curate a large-scale installation addressing HIV. This question is addressed through research into the form of gay bathhouses and saunas – spaces in which men meet strangers for sex and in which the risks associated with cruising and HIV can be explored from an architectural perspective. My research uses information about the floor plans of these spaces to develop an architectural narrative for the ASC installation. The second major research question is how can responses to this maximalist aesthetic consideration of HIV be analysed? I use the installation to gather the reaction of viewers to my alternate treatment of the subject from reviews of the exhibition, social media posts and interviews and then analyse these responses. The project asks how ASC helps communicate complex scientific ideas to non-specialist audiences. I use a number of strategies associated with relational aesthetics and the carnivalesque to enable audiences to engage with HIV in unlikely and sometimes controversial ways. Finally, the PhD asks how staging ASC in an academic context enables discourse to happen that wouldn't otherwise. The project occupies an interdisciplinary field that traverses a number of boundaries between individuals, institutions, funding bodies and community groups that sometimes leads to moments of conflict. The

research contributes to a better understanding of why these boundaries exist and how they can be negotiated.

Minimalism and Maximalism

ASC occurs over thirty years since the outbreak of the AIDS crisis in the early 1980s. The first chapter of the PhD establishes the precedent and artistic context for the ASC installation. As AIDS emerged certain artists, such as David Wojnarowicz, allied their work to activism in the fight for effective drug treatments and an end to ignorance and discrimination. In the early 1990s the artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres developed a body of work that drew on the vernacular of Minimalist and conceptual art and infused it with images, narratives and relational strategies that enabled a new form capable of addressing subjects including AIDS in a way that was less confrontational than the activist work that preceded it. Recent visual art has failed to engage with the contemporary reality of HIV as changes in behaviour, rates of transmission and perceptions of risk have shifted in the presence of new HIV drugs. Contemporary artists such as Prem Sahib have reiterated the aesthetic of Gonzalez-Torres and in so doing depoliticised the relationship between subject matter and form. *Alien Sex Club* sets out to challenge the prevailing Minimalist aesthetic approach to representing HIV.

One of the most important ways in which ASC seeks to critique the existing representation of HIV in visual art is by using what I will refer to as a Maximalist aesthetic. As the work of Gonzalez-Torres and the prevailing discourse around HIV in visual art demonstrates, the isolation of the object in space is privileged over the contextualisation of objects and ideas within one another or within more visually complex frameworks. The word Minimalism is now used casually to refer to a particular visual program that goes beyond its original reference to a specific historical period and group of artists. However, as long as there is reference to the minimal there is also an implied maximal.

By Maximalist I do not simply mean that which is in opposition to the minimal as has been defined by Pincus-Witten:

I'll call it Maximalism to make as strong a differentiation from the indurated and academicised sensibility Minimalism of the '70s as possible. (1987, p30)

This use of the word Maximalism is positioned directly against the Minimalism of the 1970s in New York, which was being challenged by a new wave of figurative painters that included Julian Schnabel during the 1980s. Also referred neo-expressionism, new image painting and new figuration this work stood in contrast to the work of Robert Mangold, Walter De Maria, Robert Morris and others that preceded it in which the body was never depicted. Exemplified by the Transavantguardia artists such as Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi and of the German Baselitz and Americans David Salle and Julian Schnabel, this new type of painting prioritised hot colour, pastiche and expressive brushwork over the previous emphasis on hiding the hand of the artist in the finished art object and isolating objects in space. Pincus-Witten's use of the term Maximalist is located firmly within the context of his own time and the term has not developed significant critical traction since then.

The term maximal has also been used casually within visual art to date but does not have a standard definition or a coherent theoretical framework in the same way as Minimalism. Artist Duggie Fields has attempted to define the term as "minimalism with a plus plus plus" (Fields, 1995, no page number). Fields' website is a virtual museum, archive and manifesto all in one. His definition of Maximalism echoes Pincus-Witten's in terms of visual excess and counterpoint to the minimal. However, whereas the Transavantguardia used expressive brushwork, Fields uses areas of flat, bright colour that ally his work more to that of the Pop artists. It is the interdisciplinarity of his practice that is most suggestive of Maximalism to me – his moving back and forth between analogue

and digital, verbal and visual. In music Maximalism is also referred to as a reaction against Minimalism (Delville, 2005) and given greater definition as a tenet of postmodernism than it is in visual culture. Delville and Norris (2005) suggest that Maximalism relates to contemporary confusion around the notions of authentic and inauthentic, which may be shared by the visual. The term is used in the discussion of both rock musician Frank Zappa and the classical music genre new complexity, which grows out of Serialism. In literary criticism, Maximalism is used to describe the systems novel (LeClair, 1989), a kind of fiction that attempts to grapple with the enormity of information in circulation in the late capitalist era.

ASC raises questions about what Maximalism is and contributes to further defining it as a term for describing art. Part of ASC is an attempt to secure this term and give it greater purpose as a critical tool for theorising visual complexity. As critique of the Minimalist approach to representing HIV I use Maximalism to repoliticise the subject. I draw on Jacques Rancière's work *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004) in order to theorise how this can be achieved. My proposition for Maximalism adheres to Rancière's description of critical art as "forms of displacement, breaking in some respects with the consensual way in which things are presented, told and made in the mainstream system" (2004, pp78-79). The Maximalism of ASC consists of a multitude of displacements manifest in spatial, visual and conceptual formations that attempt to dislodge new knowledge and mutate the discursive field of HIV. This means both visual excess that uses colour and pattern clashes but it also means contextualising distinct bodies of work within and beside each other in order to generate a larger visual field of experience.

The approach is designed to rupture the often-clinical representations of HIV by instead using complexity, immersion and multiple voices. ASC investigates HIV as a complex web of interconnected problems that need to be thought about in a holistic way. These include changes in the perception of risk due to the

availability of highly effective antiretroviral drugs to treat HIV, an increased use of recreational drugs including crystal meth associated with gay sex leading to a spike in transmissions (Bourne et al. 2014) and a reduction in the use of condoms and an increase in unprotected anal sex (known as barebacking) as well as a host of other factors that I address in the chapter on the science and cultures of HIV. These different aspects of HIV are conjoined in various ways, which I suggest are best thought about as an urban ecology. I use this phrase in the sense that the urban environment contributes to an increase in the proximity of strangers available for men to meet for sex providing an optimum environment in which viruses such as HIV can be spread (Turner, 2003). The relationship between the urban environment, cruising and sexual transmission risk is explored in greater detail in the chapter on cruising. ASC attempts to uncover the hidden relationships between different aspects of the HIV problem and argues that a contemporary representation of the subject requires a complex aesthetic in order to achieve this. Tom Burr's 1992 installation "42nd Street Structures" offers a useful starting point for thinking about the spatial properties of cruising and how an art installation could be directed to address the HIV web (Burr, 1998). Whereas Burr's installation strips the architecture of the adult bookstore down to its skeleton ASC uses this skeleton as an organisational structure upon which a new range of images can be superimposed. I use the idea of the cruise maze - a real and metaphorical structure found in gay bathhouses and saunas - to curate a maximal as opposed to a minimal representation of HIV comprised of works that I have produced in a diverse range of media including drawing, painting, artist's books, printmaking, sculpture, costume, song-writing, singing, performance, video, digital animation, and a collaboration to provide free rapid HIV testing within the installation. A chapter on the spaces of cruising examines the history of the sex club and establishes a typology of spaces that are designed to facilitate sex between strangers. This informs the spatial design of the installation.

PhD by Practice

I have used my artistic practice to research ASC. A chapter preceding the documentation of the installation addresses the methodological framework for my artistic practice and gives a critical framework for understanding the modes of expression used in the installation. However, my approach to practice-based research and the use of my practice within the PhD differs from the standard self-analytical model. The PhD employs visual art as a means for engaging in sociological inquiry. ASC exploits the context of art and the expectations of audiences to do sociological research in a new way. The main aim of the project is not to contemplate my practice but to mobilise it within an academic context in an attempt to shed fresh light on the HIV problem. Having constructed ASC as a new representation of HIV I then go on to use it as a test site for gathering audience responses to the portrayal of the subject. The project combines strategies associated with relational aesthetics and the carnivalesque and applies them to the subject of HIV in the form of hospitality, fortune telling and by offering free rapid HIV testing to audiences in an art context. This research contributes to a shift in perception about the role of artist as activist. In turn it has repercussions on what we know about how activism is done more generally.

Queer Theory

The word alien in Alien Sex Club does not refer to an extra-terrestrial life form but instead to the alien character of the sex club that I have created. Alien Sex Club is not a functional sex club but an art installation. It is unlike a sex club in the way that it is lit and for the use of colour and pattern that it employs. Alien Sex Club also does not employ typical visual strategies associated with gay and cruising subjects - there is little or no nudity, pornography or overt display of sexual acts. In this sense the exhibition is alien, or queer, in relation to its predecessors. Alien Sex Club is positioned in a novel way in relation to queer theory. The project has grown towards queer theory rather than starting from that critical position. Had the research been undertaken by a different researcher native to queer theory then the project would have taken on a different character

altogether. Because of my being native to visual art and painting especially the queer theoretical texts that I have engaged with, such as Halberstam (2011) and Schulman (2013), were discoveries that I made during the research, which have opened up new theoretical lines of enquiry for me during the making of the installation.

Multidisciplinarity

I am a visual artist but I have specifically chosen not to undertake the research for ASC within my native discipline of fine art and instead chosen to locate it within architecture so as to test and challenge my creative thinking. Transposing and displacing of knowledge and skills becomes a theme that runs throughout ASC in both written and visual form. ASC is a project that works in a hybrid disciplinary field. I have drawn on a diverse range of sources in order to construct a theoretical framework for this investigation. I use my artistic practice and methods from cultural studies to question the representation of HIV. I look outside of art to science and architecture for new images and methods of addressing the subject.

Structure of PhD

The thesis is structured in two volumes. Volume one contains the written thesis and volume two contains documentation of the installation in Ambika P3. Volume one is split into two parts that separate the theoretical research from practice based research. Part one contains four chapters that examine the artistic precedent for ASC, the scientific context within which ASC sits and the cultural context for the project from both a social and a spatial standpoint. Part two contains two chapters that address the making of ASC and analyse responses to my representation of HIV from interviews, social media posts and reviews of the installation.

Methodology for Part 1 - Autoethnography

I wish to propose autoethnographic painting as a methodology suitable for making ASC. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method employed in social science, which I repurpose within the PhD to theorise painting and the approach that I take within my artistic practice to making the installation.

Autoethnography is a term that is used to cover a broad array of investigations that employ personal accounts in order to generate new knowledge.

Autoethnographers are researchers who use their own personal experience as a starting point to make broader cultural observations. To date, autoethnography has mainly been discussed within the context of sociology, performance and film (Bloustein and Baker, 2003). For the social scientist, autoethnography is a process through which the personal can be prioritised in a way that it has not always been in the past. This may allow for missing knowledge to be acquired. Sociologist Wanda Pillow suggests that autoethnography can “challenge the limits of existing notions and understandings of what is acceptable research practice” (2003, p188). For art and painting discourse the use of the personal may not be so fraught. My definition of autoethnographic painting also enlists Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1984) concepts of the carnivalesque, heteroglossia, the dialogic and the polyvocal in order to understand how painted fictions can be developed using the life of the author as the subject. Within the context of ASC autoethnographic painting means a way of using my own personal experiences, combined with the voices of other artists, academics and individuals to generate a body of fictional work that addresses the subject of HIV and transmission risk.

Methodology for Part 2 – Textual and Thematic Analysis

I use the installation to gather the responses of audiences to my representation of HIV. These responses take the form of reviews of the exhibition, interviews and social media posts, which are gathered over the period July to October 2015 and collected in full in appendices 2-4. The sources include reviews in journals, magazines, newspapers and on radio, interviews undertaken with people

involved in the installation as collaborators, performers and audience members and social media posts on Instagram - an online mobile photo-sharing, video-sharing, and social networking service that enables its users to take pictures and videos, and share them with others. This material is supported and given greater context by a range of other sources that include photographic documentation of the installation, video footage from the opening night of the exhibition, posts from Twitter relating to ASC and data from Google Analytics relating to the project website. A series of appendices provide the full data and longer descriptions of how it was gathered and preliminarily sorted. The analysis aims to find out if ASC contributed to any shift in the discussion around HIV from how it represented the problem. By comparing the way in which ASC was spoken about with my study of artistic representations of HIV in chapter one I may be able to understand something about the public attitude to HIV and art. Given the relatively short period of time that has elapsed since the installation I can only draw limited conclusions at this stage. Six key themes emerge from the data: group show, cardboard, playfulness, zaniness, relating differently to AIDS and humour. Analysing the installation through how it was discussed by others also allows me to shed new light on Maximalism and begin to develop new theories.

My analysis draws on a number of theoretical resources especially Sianne Ngai's discussion of aesthetic zaniness (Ngai, 2012) in order to better understand Maximalism. Ngai defines zaniness as a central tenet of contemporary art and life, epitomised by the actress Lucille Ball in the TV series *I Love Lucy* (1951) in which she plays a woman constantly having to reinvent herself. Zaniness for Ngai is indexed to the late capitalist drive towards flexible labour and adaptability, syphoned through spectacle. The zany, or "zanni" (Ngai, 2012, p14) from the Italian Commedia dell-Arte¹ character, is a jack-of-all-trades and a clown. Ngai's critique of culture's emphasis on zaniness has implications on my analysis of responses to ASC. I also address the production values of the exhibition as an aspect of Maximalism, which I discuss in relation to Marcia Tucker's "*Bad*" *Painting* exhibition at The New Museum in New York in 1978. In an equivalent way to how "*Bad*" *Painting* transgresses Classical ideals of drawing ASC

privileges bad craft and the hand of the artist over fabrication and slickness. Maximalism is not only visually excessive but also potentially anti-slick. Responses to the installation emphasise the role that gallows humour played in my treatment of the subject i.e. humour in the face of death. This use of humour within the installation was controversial for some audience members. Allon White (1993) suggests “Seriousness always has more to do with power than with content” and ASC draws attention to who are the gatekeepers of the discussion around HIV. However, generally the provocative elements of the installation appealed to viewers because they removed the earnestness often associated with HIV and allowed a fresh insight into the subject. This was furthered by the use of performance in the form of a bar and fortune telling. These live elements differed from Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 1998) because they were part of a larger visual framework that included objects. ASC used hospitality and live art to engage viewers in discussions about HIV and encourage them to make conceptual relationships between parts of the installation that addressed different aspects of the problem. In this way ASC helped contribute towards a shift in the way that audiences related to AIDS.

Chapter Summaries

ASC is framed within a recent resurgence of interest in the work of artists such as David Wojnarowicz and the artist’s collective Gran Fury in large museum shows in the USA. These include a section devoted to HIV/AIDS art at the opening of the new Whitney Museum building in the meatpacking district of New York in 2015 entitled *Love Letter from the War Front* (2015). This re-examination of AIDS art seeks to correct the avoidance of the subject that occurred within many institutions during the 1980s, which critic Jori Finkel refers to as “the erasure of queer history” (2015, no page number) Many of these artists put their art to the work of activism informed by the context of ignorance, stigma and a lack of treatment for the virus at the time. Gregg Bordowitz reminds us “That period, from 1986 to 1995, when there was no effective treatment for AIDS, was very traumatic” (2010, p74). In works such as “Silence = Death”

(1990) Wojnarowicz (born 1954, lived New York) sewed his lips up as an act of protest against government censorship and inaction on AIDS contributing to the spread of the virus. Gran Fury's pre-Internet form of agitprop used posters and graphic design to pithily and wittily attack mainstream homophobia and Reagan's conservatism in relation to AIDS. Furthermore, the activism of artists affected by AIDS was part of a larger intersection of artist-activists protesting discrimination on the grounds of race, gender and class at the time. This activist aesthetic was followed by a Minimalist approach to representing AIDS pioneered by Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Gonzalez-Torres (born Cuba 1957 lived New York) innovated a Minimalist aesthetic that dominated New York in his day by including objects that could be eaten by audience members or taken away from the gallery and also by adding images and narratives that would not have been possible within the critical framework of Agnes Martin and Robert Morris that he inherited. His work had the appearance of a Minimalism that preceded it but was hybridised with conceptual and narrative approaches that transformed it into something new. Among the autobiographical subjects that he tackled was his own AIDS. His work influenced the discussion of Relational Aesthetics proposed by Nicolas Bourriaud (1998) at the time because of the way in which it challenged the conventions of the gallery. Gonzalez-Torres' work evolved a new genre in which queer subjects, including AIDS, were codified within the conventions of Minimalism. This specific pairing of aesthetic and subject has become a received position for subsequent artists addressing similar subjects including Hamad Butt, Nicolas Dehayes and Prem Sahib. I use the work of Ralph Cohen (1986) to theorise the stabilisation of what I call Queer Minimalism as a particular genre within visual art. The chapter titled "HIV and Art" establishes a baseline by which it is possible to measure the contribution ASC makes to the subject of HIV and how it differs from these approaches. One of the primary differences between ASC and the HIV/AIDS themed artworks that have preceded it is the maximalist approach it takes as opposed to the Minimalist one. I suggest that the Minimalist treatment of HIV by contemporary artists such as Sahib is nostalgic and politically inert. Sahib's work privileges processes that render the hand of the author absent and produce a clinical effect. His work operates within the rules of the genre developed by Gonzalez-Torres and aims to simulate the

same political agency but fails to deliver it. Sahib's work represents the solidification of Queer Minimalism into a genre. He represents a larger tendency towards the academicisation of the queer. The final section of this chapter narrates how artists such as Jordan Wolfson and Eddie Peake have appropriated Queer Minimalism and further depoliticised the aesthetic. I draw on Sarah Schulman's *Gentrification of the Mind* (2013) and Jonathan P Watts' essay "Poser Punks" (2014) in order to question the cyclical processes by which artistic practices are absorbed within the canon of art history.

The chapter titled "The Science and Cultures of HIV" addresses the need to challenge and update the existing representation of HIV by researching the subject from a scientific perspective. I research images and ideas associated with the science of HIV in order to inform my artistic practice as part of the installation. Media representations of HIV frequently depict the viral envelope (the outer protein shell of the virus that tricks entry into the host cell) and this chapter draws on new scientific knowledge being generated about the shape of the viral capsid (the inner protein shell that contains the genetic information that produces more virus) and the function that it performs within viral replication.² ASC addresses an increase in rates of HIV infection among gay men in the UK by around 3500 annually despite intensive prevention (Aghaizu et al. 2013). This chapter attempts to understand the factors contributing to this increase including changes in sexual practices and shifts in perceptions of risk compared to the earlier part of the AIDS crisis. The scientific understanding of HIV has improved rapidly over the past thirty years. The chapter researches the process of infection, viral replication and treatment for HIV, looking at early antiretroviral drugs and comparing them to new ones. Antiretroviral therapy (ART) is a combination drug treatment that acts on different stages of the HIV lifecycle in order to control the virus. Advances in technology have led to one-a-day treatments such as ATRIPLA, which reduce pill burden and allow patients to lead a more normal life. Because of these medical changes HIV has moved from a life-threatening condition leading to AIDS to a manageable and treatable life-long condition. The reduction in pill burden associated with treatment has meant that

HIV has gone from a public to a private condition. The latent homophobia and ignorance about HIV/AIDS in the mainstream media of the 1980s and 1990s that Simon Watney (1987) has critiqued has given way to a general belief that HIV is no longer a Western problem despite the data, possibly because of the privatisation of the problem. Improvements in drug treatments have seen a converse drop in condom use, known as condom fatigue, attributed to a lack of pleasure associated with their use and reduced intimacy. Since the early 1990s unprotected anal sex, or barebacking, has increased (Huffington Post, 2013) Leo Bersani's influential essay "Is The Rectum a Grave?" (1987, pp197-222) addresses the mythology surrounding unprotected anal sex between men and Michael Schernoff's (2013) book *Without Condoms* evidences the pleasure and transgression surrounding intimacy and risk involved in bareback sex. An understanding of these subjects informs my artistic representation of HIV risk within the installation. My study touches on the graphic imagery of posters associated with public health campaigns designed to prevent the spread of HIV and encourage testing and knowing one's HIV status. There is a rich archive, which runs parallel to the art historical canon but which is lesser known that I am able to draw on as imagery for the installation and reposition within fine art. Consideration of scientific diagrams and specialist language surrounding HIV from the disciplines of sexual health and biomedicine can inform the creation of new artworks and act as source material for the installation. Recent research project at UCL *A Comprehensive Assessment of the Prevention Role of Antiretroviral therapy* (CAPRA) identified changes in behaviour and approaches to sexual risk among gay men due to the existence of ART. Some gay men may no longer fear AIDS because treatment is available. Sociologists Aveline (1995) and Hospers (1999) have explored the risks surrounding MSM (men who have sex with men) an acronym, which has been developed to include men who do not identify culturally as gay but have sex with men. It is important to address changing methods of HIV prevention because ASC occurs at a time when studies for commissioning Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (known as PrEP) as public health policy in the UK are returning their initial findings and being debated (PROUD Study, 2016). It also comes at a time when home testing for HIV has recently become available. Increasingly a policy of "treatment as prevention" is being

adopted since recent work has demonstrated a reduction in the infectivity of individuals on antiretroviral therapy (Cairns, 2016, no page number). One of the largest factors contributing to new HIV transmissions in Western cities is Chemsex – the use of recreational drugs within sex, especially crystal methamphetamine (crystal meth), GHB and mephadrone. The study of HIV from a scientific perspective enables understanding of the subject as a complex and interconnected web of problems.

Alien Sex Club refers to a number of sociocultural and behavioural practices associated with HIV risk known collectively as cruising. I devote a chapter to investigate what cruising for sex between men is in order to help represent the important part that cruising plays in HIV risk within the installation. Cruising can broadly be defined as the attempt to pick up a sexual partner, usually a stranger (Turner, 2003). My analysis identifies gaydar, slang, nature, the city, digital space and Grindr as key components of cruising. Cruising for sex with strangers relies heavily on the gaze and its return by the other. Cheryl Nicolas (2004) identifies the gaze as a key aspect of cruising in her article on the gaydar – a slang term for the recognition sought between homosexuals, or gay radar. She argues that because being gay is not characterised by particular physiognomic characteristics homosexual men and women are forced to engage in certain non-verbal behaviours that signify identity and recognition to others. These non-verbal signifiers might include gestures, modes of fashion and especially eye contact. It is important to understand the nuances of cruising in order to appreciate the delicate nature of the communication (or lack of) that goes on between strangers and how adding HIV into this context can be risky. However, there are verbal properties that exist in cruising – most notably forms of slang, such as Polari, that proprietorially mark out gay men to each other and shield them from the glare of possibly hostile individuals. Paul Baker's (2002) study of Polari demonstrates a sophisticated lexicon of words, used primarily in the UK during the 1950s, that employ English grammar and a range of bastardised other languages and slangs in order to create a linguistic zone that signifies being a gay man. Polari allows gay men to codify themselves – hiding both in plain sight and

signifying themselves to other gay men simultaneously. Polari may belong to an era before homosexual acts were legalised in the UK but the verbal play, humour and dexterity of it lives on both within contemporary gay culture (Burston, 2016) as well as in the general consciousness thanks to the 1960s Radio 4 comedy programme "Round the Horne." Contemporary online cruising has a slang of its own that addresses body types and sexual preferences in a way that is more blunt than Polari. Yet, the central aspect of cruising is neither looking nor talking but walking. In discussing men cruising in the woods Aaron Betsky (1997) compares cruising to the Aboriginal walkabout. Cruising in nature often involved walking around particular spaces that become known as cruising grounds. In his exploration of cruising *Backwards Glances* Mark Turner (2003) explores cruising as the pursuit of sex – the goal of sex – as opposed to the sexual act itself. Cruising has been well documented as happening in city parks such as Russell Square in London - before it was re-landscaped to prevent cruising (Local Government Chronicle, 1998) - or famously on Hampstead Heath (Jones, 2010). I discuss the psychological aspects of cruising from a personal perspective as well as from the accounts of others. Turner theorises "The cruiser queers the flâneur" (2003, p62), engaging in the city not with the same aimlessness as the flâneur but as a kind of psycho-geographer of sex. Turner's definition emphasises cruising as a response both to rapid urbanisation during the 19th century and the arrival of strangers to the city that came with it. Cruising embraces the alienation of the city both literally and metaphorically. Shelby describes cruising as a process in which "the self can be destabilised" (2002, p192). This understanding of cruising in analogue spaces informs my interpretation of cruising online using platforms such as Craigslist and Squirt.org. I draw on Mowlabocus (2010) who has written about the construction of websites and databases for cruising and shown them both to imitate analogue spaces such as streets and rooms as well as to limit choice in ways that is dictated by the writer of the software. The popular smartphone app Grindr goes beyond Internet sites by using Global Positioning Systems to map how far away from the use prospective sexual partners are. Grindr is the most effective technology to date to transform cruising into a digital space that allows for chatting, picture swapping and mapping in equivalent but new ways to the analogue cruising of the park or the woods. The long-term

implications of this technology on the individual are yet to be proven. However, I use the work of Susan Buck-Morss (1986) to address the sale-of-self that it encourages.

My investigation of cruising is developed further in a chapter titled “The Spaces of Sex” in which I address the construction of spaces designed specifically to facilitate cruising. Sociologists Holmes and O’Byrne observe “Men’s desire for other men has created a landscape of spaces (real and virtual) where sex takes place in parks, alleys, restrooms, rest stops, adult theatres, video arcades, book stores, bars, gay bathhouses and finally the Internet” (2007, p274). This section is an examination of how and why certain spatial types are used for cruising. In order to analyse the characteristics of these different spaces I draw on sociological ideas of the Public Sex Environment (PSE) and Commercial Sex Environment (CSE) and make a distinction between spaces that are repurposed from their original use for sex (parks, public toilets) compared to spaces designed specifically to facilitate sex (porn cinemas, gay bathhouses). I also identify that there is a grey area that exists in this definition of spaces that are ambiguous, such as straight saunas, clubs, gyms and adult bookstores. This approach draws on Aaron Betsky’s theory of “queer space,” (1997, p5) which addresses how until relatively recently men who have sex with men have historically repurposed public spaces for sex rather than used spaces that were designed with that sole purpose in mind. I use my own personal experiences of cruising gay bathhouses and saunas in order to give examples and illustrate the spatial properties and psychological effects of such spaces. This includes adult bookstores from the USA, which do not exist in the same way in the UK but can be found in some European cities. The chapter offers a historical overview of how during the twentieth century Western culture has changed its approach to sex between men by looking at the spaces in which gay male sex has gone on. In order to understand the sex club as a particular spatial type I first of all have to understand the emergence of the gay bathhouse as a venue that references the Turkish hammam and the Roman baths. In discussing the Continental Baths, a famous gay bathhouse in New York during the 1970s, I am able to understand

the gay bathhouse as a micro-society in which men, in addition to having sex together, could bathe, exercise, read, eat, dance, party, watch movies and be entertained by singers including Bette Midler and Barry Manilow (Holmes et al. 2007). Prior and Cusack (2008) argue that the pre-AIDS bathhouse culture of the 1970s was an instrumental aspect of gay male liberation in that it was a homo-social space in which men could rehearse being openly gay with each other rather than in relation to straight men. During the early part of the AIDS crisis many New York bathhouses and public swimming pools were closed, since they were perceived to be spaces in which the virus could be transmitted more frequently (Gross, 1985). Woods and Binson draw attention to the way in which the spaces of sex are designed to facilitate cruising using structures that promote walking, gazing and intimate contact with multiple strangers:

lurid hallways with rooms on either side, doors opening and closing, men entering and leaving, and a seemingly endless walking around routine with apparently little sex (2003, p155).

The cruise maze is referred to in many descriptions of these places as a real and metaphorical web of corridors and rooms in which cruisers can get lost and be entertained. It is this maze-like layout that I draw on as a spatial equivalent for the web-like nature of the HIV problem that I have observed. In developing an architectural narrative for the installation I draw on Nigel Coates' (2012) idea of the sequence narrative, a form of architectural quotation in which spaces of different types can be juxtaposed beside each other in order to create contrasts. ASC is designed as a kind of cruise maze in which audiences can encounter a range of artworks that address the interconnectedness of HIV. The sex club is a type of space that inherits the gay bathhouse but removes the premise of hygiene from the equation. The sex club also quotes a range of other spaces including the gym, the gloryhole of the toilet or adult bookstore and the projection screen of the porn cinema but safely places it within private space. The sex club is a spatial type that formalises cruising and sexual risk, allowing transgression to be performed and restaged within the safe confines of private space.

The fifth chapter of the thesis, "The Making of Alien Sex Club," addresses the theoretical framework and the practical work involved in building the installation in Ambika P3. Autoethnography is a relatively new social science methodology, which seeks to use personal narratives, the voices of others and storytelling to address under-represented subjects. Tammy Spry describes autoethnography as a "critical self-reflective discourse" (2005, p706). ASC applies theory from autoethnography to address painting and use my own personal experiences as source material for creating fictional narratives about HIV. Through an engagement with a diverse range of materials and processes and by using Bakhtin's idea of the polyvocal (1984) ASC is conceived of as a space in which HIV can be addressed from a number of different angles simultaneously. This applies to individual works and to the installation as a whole. Artist Howard Hodgkin employs the personal as a source for his own paintings in works such as "When did we go to Morocco?" (1988-93). He uses mark making and colour as devices for transforming the personal into the fictional. In a different way American artist David Salle composes his work using collage in order to produce the effect that a painting has multiple authors. Salle's paintings such as "Helena and 5 A.M" (2006) appropriate images from different historical periods and high and low culture, playing them off against each other within a single frame to create heterogeneous fictions. Furthermore, in a talk at the ICA in 2011 Salle argued that this kind of visual polyvocality is not exclusive to works made in paint. He cited video artist Ryan Trecartin (born 1981, USA) as an example of someone extending collage into moving image and described this approach as pictorial (Salle, 2011, no page number). Salle's definition of painting has informed the production of ASC. Because of the heterogeneous nature of the installation I have used certain images to develop a visual syntax within the installation that can help bind diverse parts together and help audiences make sense of the space. The "Alien Sex Club Tarot Set" (Volume 2, fig.304, p205) is a form of lexicon containing images that recur across paintings, printed wallpapers and in videos. The complex nature of the installation informed a number of difficulties between individuals and organisations, which formed a key part of the research. The overall effect of this chapter is to describe my maximalist aesthetic.

The final chapter of volume one, entitled “Analysing Responses to Alien Sex Club,” uses data gathered from responses to ASC from audience members to generate insight into the representation of HIV and Maximalism. Three appendices contain the full data collected from reviews of the exhibition, interviews with audience members and social media posts relating to the installation. Six key themes emerge from this data, which frame my discussion: group show, cardboard, playfulness, zaniness, relating differently to AIDS and humour. One invigilator at the exhibition reported “Lots of people enquired as to if the exhibition was group or solo” (Appendix 3.9, p313). Others referred to ASC as “epic” (Appendix 2.6, p293). I draw on Sianne Ngai’s discussion of novelty and repetition (Ngai, 2012, p149) to interrogate the positive and negative aspects of scale, complexity and polyvalence informed by these responses. Discussion of the exhibition also focused on the production values employed, with particular reference paid to the use of cardboard, light materials and bright colours. I pay a great deal of attention to a discussion of ASC between curator Francesca Gavin and broadcaster Robert Bound on Monacle Radio (Appendix 2.7, pp293-298). I draw on Marcia Tucker’s essay for the *“Bad” Painting* (1978) exhibition at The New Museum in New York and Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) in order to theorise the role of craft badness and the exchange between handmade and printed in the installation. Ngai’s theory of the zany (2012, p24) informs how I reconceptualise Maximalism and the greater social and fiscal implications zaniness poses. This in turn informs my analysis of the way ASC has shifted the way audiences relate to AIDS and HIV, particularly in how the installation uses humour. My interpretation of responses to the tragicomedy of ASC is informed by Butt and Rogoff’s discussion of humour and seriousness (2013). At this early stage I can only draw limited conclusions about the effects of ASC on the discussion of HIV.

Volume two presents documentation of the installation at Ambika P3, documentation of the events that occurred, photographs of all individual works contained within the exhibition, lyrics to the songs, a transcript of the “Goatguy and Bummy Pete” video (2014), a CD of the songs and a DVD of the videos from the installation.

¹ Commedia Dell’Arte is a traditional form of Italian theatre that features a cast of archetypes who wear costumes specific to their type. Famous characters include Harlequin, Pierrot and Pulcinello.

² See www.ucl.ac.uk/towers-lab/ as papers are awaiting publication at the time of writing.

PART ONE

1
HIV and Art

This chapter establishes the cultural context, which frames Alien Sex Club (ASC). It is a precedent study for the installation as opposed to a literature review. I will address the role that visual art has played since the 1980s in response to the AIDS crisis by discussing the work of David Wojnarowicz, Gran Fury, ACTUP and General Idea investigating their relationships with activism and the emergence of new artistic genres that have resulting from this relationship. I address the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Hamad Butt, Prem Sahib and Nicolas Deshayes in order to critique the dominant Minimalist approach to the discussion of HIV, gay and queer subjects within visual art. I discuss the assimilation of queer subjects within the mainstream of art using two examples, Jordan Wolfson and Eddie Peake, in order to argue a position for ASC that differentiates itself from this context using alternate visual means.

1.1 The contemporary revisiting of the 1980s

There has recently been a resurgence of interest in art of the 1980s that directly addressed AIDS. Exhibitions such as *HIDE / SEEK: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture* at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington DC (2011), which included portraits by Robert Mapplethorpe or *Love Letter from the War Front* - staged to mark the opening of the new Whitney Museum in New York - revisit and re-evaluate the art of AIDS thirty years on. Such exhibitions also attempt to make up for the lack of institutional representation of the subject that occurred at the time AIDS first emerged. Art critic Jori Finkel suggests this renewed interest as being to do with artists looking for an alternative historical narrative to situate themselves within:

The show reflects a larger trend sweeping the US today - a growing interest in revisiting and deepening our understanding of the period in which AIDS threatened to destroy the art world and also dramatically shaped it. Instead of a story of 1980s American art-making starring neo-Expressionist bad boys like Julian Schnabel and David Salle, artists such as Moffett, Wong, Goldin, Wojnarowicz, Robert Gober and Keith Haring are becoming more central, achieving increased recognition of the sheer diversity of their work (Finkel, 2015, no page number).

She views AIDS as an attack on individuals that threatened the fabric of the art world through a loss of its members. She also suggests that the response many artists living with AIDS made by addressing the subject in their work has had a lasting impact on the direction taken by artistic discourse during the 1980s and ever since. The new AIDS exhibitions are a form of revisionism through which art history is rewritten to accommodate voices that were undervalued thirty years ago and have been ascribed greater importance today. I agree with Finkel that in a crowded art world artists look to lesser-known bodies of work as models for developing their own oeuvres. However, I do not think that this is solely a case of The National Portrait Gallery in Washington DC responding to a trend amongst artists. Finkel argues, “museums are being critiqued for the erasure of queer history” (2015, no page number). This is true in the sense that museums neglected the subject for a long time and that they are only catching up now. However, it omits discussion of the critical and financial economies that have developed posthumously around artists such as Felix Gonzalez-Torres, David Wojnarowicz and Keith Haring.

1.2 Protest Art: David Wojnarowicz, Gran Fury, ACTUP, General Idea and Keith Haring

There is a marked contrast between the forthcoming retrospective of David Wojnarowicz (New York, died 1992) scheduled for the Whitney Museum later in 2016 and the attack launched against the National Endowment for the Arts during the 1980s by the American Family Association for funding his work (Wojnarowicz, 1995). Wojnarowicz won a lawsuit against Donald Wildmon of American Family Association after he sent a defamatory pamphlet to members of Congress that included reproductions of the artist’s work. With the distance of time, and the absence of the artist himself, Wojnarowicz’s art of protest can finally be absorbed by museum culture. It’s hard now to relate to the anger that fills Wojnarowicz’s artistic output. A famous image of the artist shows him with his mouth sewn shut (fig.1), enacting a violent physical gesture on himself to

emulate and criticise the way in which he feels he is being censored by the institutions of power and by extension the way in which AIDS is being silenced by the government of the day. More so in the film “ITSOFOMO,” which Wojnarowicz made with Ben Neill in 1991, we see the artist employ a larger palette of propaganda techniques in his polemic against the US government over its failure to address the AIDS crisis. In order to understand Wojnarowicz’s anger it is important to remember the stigma and ignorance surrounding HIV/AIDS at the time he made the work and the lack of medical treatments that were available to him and others living with the disease. Lucy Lippard quotes Wojnarowicz’s own writing:

I know I’m not going to die merely because I got fucked in the ass without a condom or because I swallowed a stranger’s semen. If I die it is because a handful of people in power, in organised religions and political institutions, believe that I am expendable (Wojnarowicz and Lippard, pp24-25).

Wojnarowicz speaks directly to expose the inner workings of the relationship between the spread of AIDS and government policy. His confrontational and aggressive approach might be part of the reason why younger contemporary artists are interested in his work since there has been an overall cultural shift away from conviction politics from the early 1980s until now, which makes it seem attractive and nostalgic. Wojnarowicz draws attention to homophobia operating within American society, which saw AIDS as a gay disease and a punishment from god. The writer Gregg Bordowitz points out “That period, from 1986 to 1995, when there was no effective treatment for AIDS, was very traumatic” (Bordowitz, 2010, p74). Lippard points out the “apocalyptic tone of Wojnarowicz’s work” (Wojnarowicz and Lippard, p18) – perhaps an appropriate response to AIDS, which was then a death sentence. This is the period that Wojnarowicz’s work records. Within the anger of his “cosmography” (Wojnarowicz and Lippard, p11) lie a wide range of formal strategies and devices that allow not only AIDS but a broader spectrum of gay subjects to enter art. A series of black and white photographs from 1988-99, all “Untitled” (and referred to collectively as the *Sex Series*), feature circular vignettes that allow the introduction of images secondary to the overall visual field. These include

viruses, x-rays and pornography that appear to be seen through gloryholes, in mouths or on petri dishes (fig.2). The use of black and white lends the work a sense of it being documentary footage, which is amplified by the artist's use of written text. Wojnarowicz used photography and painting in tandem; often contrasting different registers of black and white and colour in order to generate juxtapositions of emphasis. "Bad Moon Rising" (fig.3) uses images of American bank notes as a ground for a painting of Saint Sebastian bound to a tree. He is fragmented – missing head and feet – and associated with images that suggest it may be AIDS that has killed him rather than arrows. Petri dishes become clocks that measure the rate of the virus infecting the body. This AIDS martyr is being held together with red stitches that keep in place patches depicting sexual acts, domesticity and infestation. Wojnarowicz is showing us the corruption of the body politic in its response to AIDS.



Fig.1. Wojnarowicz, David (1990). *Untitled* [still from the Rosa von Praunheim film "Silence = Death"].

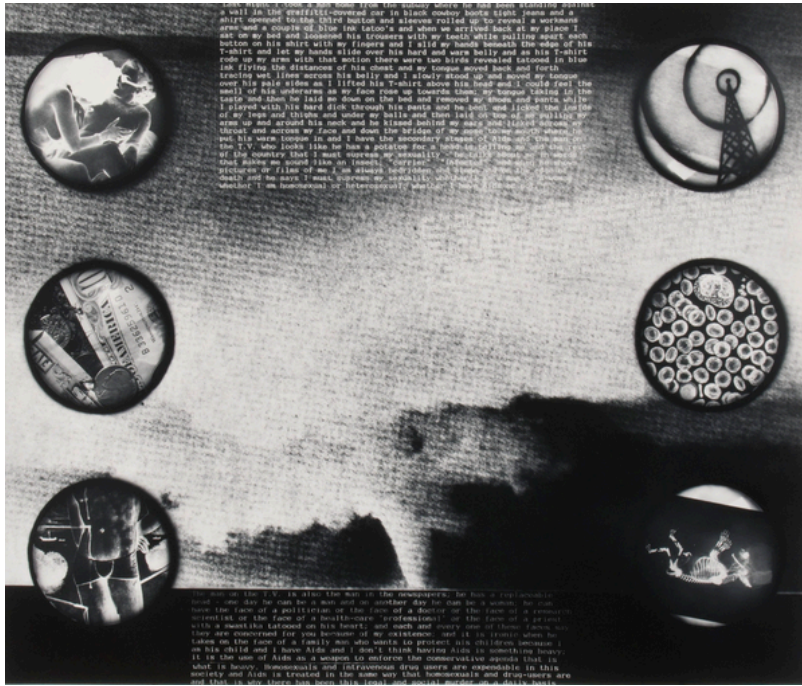


Fig.2. Wojnarowicz, David (1989). *Untitled from Sex Series (tornado)* [Gelatin silver print]. Whitney Museum, New York.

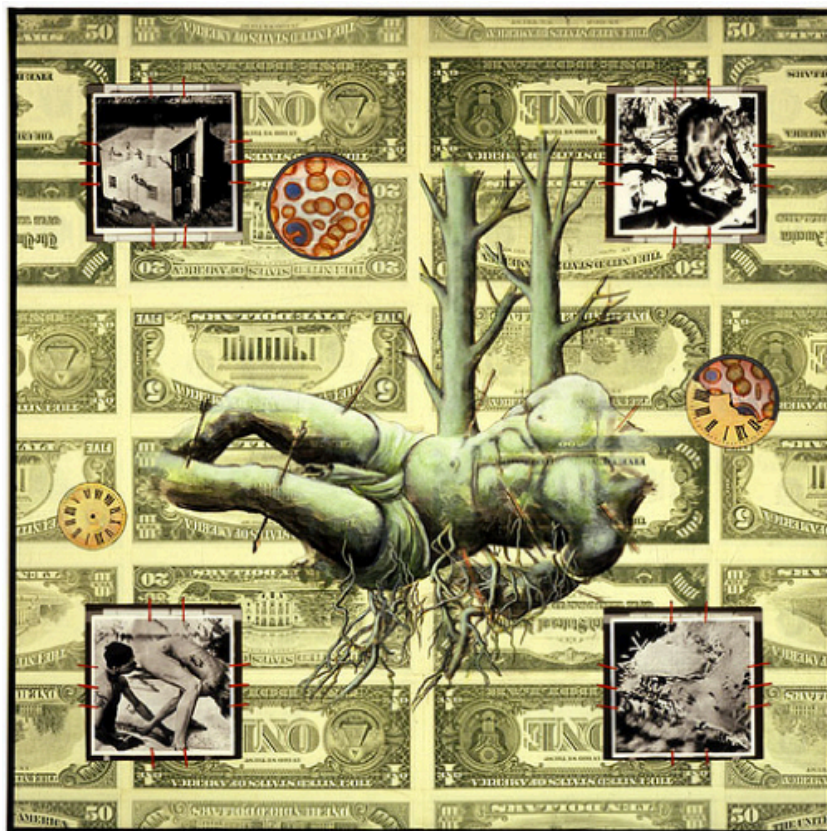


Fig.3. Wojnarowicz, David (1989). *Bad Moon Rising* [Black and white photographs, acrylic, string and collage on Masonite]. P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York.

Art and AIDS activism became synonymous for some artists during the 1980s. The collective Gran Fury (based in New York) used their work as a form of protest against the social stigma attached AIDS as well as to government inaction in addressing the crisis. Their posters for the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) such as "Silence = Death" (fig.4) were provocative images that combined the graphic simplicity of advertising with a strong propagandist message. The pink triangle alludes to the badge used by the Nazis to attribute male homosexual prisoners. Repositioned within the context of AIDS and combined with the slogan the pink triangle in this poster equates US government inaction with the holocaust. Courting controversy like this was the stock in trade of ACT UP and Gran Fury. Their goals were expressly political: to incite discussion about the plague and thus change government policy. The use of shock tactics in posters distributing messages such as "The Government Has Blood On Its Hands" (fig.5) was alarming and thought provoking. Gran Fury's work built on the information aesthetic of conceptual art but repurposed it through advertising culture. It tried to compete with the capitalist aesthetics of the day and redirect them towards social change. The group used art as the platform for political statements, delivering statistics that may otherwise get lost in the newspaper - about death rates caused by AIDS – and bringing them to a different audience.

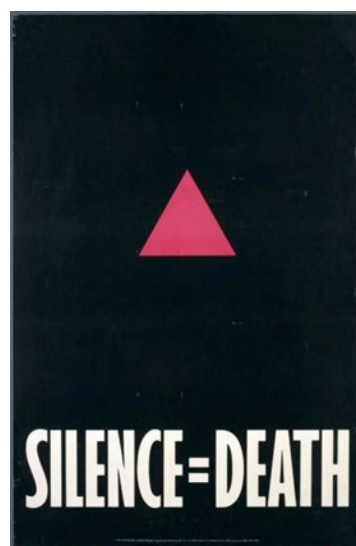


Fig.4. Gran Fury (1986). *Silence = Death* [Silence = Death Project, Poster, offset lithography, 29" x 24"].

Critic Jesse Green discusses the factors contributing to why AIDS may have featured so prominently as a subject for artists during the 1980s. She observes, “AIDS made its debut among a very cultured group of people” (Green, 2003, no page number) going on to suggest that the emergence of a particular type of aesthetic politics was partly an accident of the demographic affected by AIDS:

I sometimes wonder what would have happened if instead of emerging among urban gay men, AIDS had first burrowed its way into the sexual lives of, say, accountants... Would we have, as a result, a fabulous trove of new accountancy procedures? (Green, 2003, no page number).

Gay men and accountants may not be mutually exclusive groups. However, the suggestion is that there is greater precedent for artists to address their work to activism rather than accountants. She draws attention to the geographic, social and sexual conditions in which AIDS art flourished. The coincidence of AIDS affecting a lot of creative people was a perfect condition in which art and activism could coalesce. The aestheticisation of AIDS became a necessary device in the process by which artists could speak to the crisis:

And so SILENCE=DEATH, which almost immediately was pressed into service as the unofficial logo of the nascent AIDS advocacy and protest organization Act Up, has long outlasted that group's vigorous prime, if not its agenda (Green, 2003, no page number).

Green acknowledges the success of Gran Fury’s aesthetic approach to the subject. The poster has become a classic, known by younger people who did not live through the AIDS crisis, who may now see the poster as a fragment of social history. Green cautions against the temporal nature of activist art – it has a particular shelf life. He asks if the political aspirations that Gran Fury had were “too much of an agenda for poor little art to shoulder” (Green, 2003, no page number). There is a possibility that art thinks of itself as capable of large-scale intellectual, emotional and organisational change. Whether or not ACT UP, Gran Fury and others changed the policy around AIDS and access to healthcare may not necessarily be proven. However, their work can be seen as part of a larger discursive shift as the decade of the 1980s progressed to address AIDS within

mainstream culture, in their case through art. The way in which Gran Fury and others reorganise the world aesthetically may define their politics. The protest art of AIDS repositioned the imagery and statements of art and AIDS, fusing them, swapping them and reorganising them into new formations. In turn this also mutated the role of the artist, transforming him or her from an image-maker into an activist. Protest AIDS art exposed the mechanism by which all art is political and all artists are activists by recalibrating the emphasis placed on the clarity of messages and the specificity of the subjects that they referred to from the standard calibrations. AIDS activism did not exist in isolation but intersected with other political agendas including feminism, racial politics. Other artists, such as Keith Haring, switched registers regularly within their practice between AIDS activism and other approaches. Haring's posters such as "Stop AIDS" (fig.6) employed cartooning to address serious political subjects. AIDS is shown as a snake that is being destroyed by a pair of scissors that is made up of two people, each a blade. The implication of the poster was that AIDS can be destroyed by a collective effort.



Fig.5. Gran Fury (1988). *The Government Has Blood on Its Hands* [Poster, offset lithography, 31" x 49"].



Fig.6. Haring, Keith (1989). *Stop AIDS* [Poster].

One of the most ingenious projects of the 1980s dealing with AIDS was “Imagevirus” created by the Canadian collective General Idea (Canadian working in New York). They transformed Robert Indiana’s famous configuration of letters spelling out the word L-O-V-E into A-I-D-S (fig.7). The idea to subvert Indiana’s original was in deliberately bad taste and echoed the kind of parodic transformations being undertaken contemporaneously by Gran Fury. However, “Imagevirus” was a more sophisticated critique of AIDS than the one-liners of Gran Fury. “Imagevirus” was an on going project that lasted over six years and manifested itself in paintings, posters, sculptures, adverts, stamps, wallpapers and jewellery. General Idea’s repetition of the AIDS logo across different contexts served to emulate the “fundamental tactic of the virus: confusion” (Bordowitz, 2010, p17). They did not personify or anthropomorphise the virus rather presented it as an indiscriminate traveller that requires a host. The promiscuous way in which General Idea approached the spread of the image across different

cultural and geographic spaces mimicked the spread of the virus within the body:

The political significance of *Imagevirus* rested in its refusal to assign any meaning or value to AIDS by amplifying the general state of mind fostered by a commercial culture moored in conservative religious morality (Bordowitz, 2010, p109).

“Imagevirus” was a form of institutional critique that extended on the strategies of ACT UP by further conjoining them to theories that had emerged out of conceptual art. “Imagevirus” has been described as a form of viral marketing that echoed the “precision, simplicity and cruelty” (Bordowitz, 2010, p15) of HIV in the way that it infects the world using visual means. The project began to expose the cultural replication and life cycle of the virus as a parallel to the scientific understanding that was developing at the time. Described as a “hive mind” (Bordowitz, 2010, p65) General Idea comprised of Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal and AA Bronson. Before the deaths of Partz and Zontal from AIDS in 1994 the group made a lot of work that dealt with the subject and it has been suggested that living with AIDS was itself an artform for General Idea that they practiced in public as a form of activism (Bordowitz, 2010). In his book about the project Gregg Bordowitz discusses the implications of working as a collective in which the idea of self is up for grabs; through the unconventional form of their authorship General Idea were able to create an unconventional form of object or output:

...this self-fashioning, self-naming, self-determining modus operandi was fundamental to the anti-establishment art of General Idea, which emerged out of a revolutionary culture determined to overthrow official histories as lies perpetrated by the ruling class, the patriarchy and heterosexual culture (Bordowitz, 2010, p72).

Art challenged the dominant discourse of AIDS. Thus “Imagevirus” operates within a broader investigation of queer subjectivity by General Idea. Their living situation, and the way in which the polyamory of their relationship combined with their working relationship was key in producing a situation in which a project such as “Imagevirus” could develop.



Fig.7. General Idea (1988). *AIDS (wallpaper)* [Screenprint on paper, dimensions variable].

1.3 Queering Minimalism - Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Hamad Butt, Prem Sahib and Nicolas Deshayes

If the work of one artist has dominated the representation and discussion of HIV/AIDS in visual culture it is that of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. Gonzalez-Torres was an American artist born in Cuba in 1957 who died from AIDS in New York in 1996. He is well known for a series of sculptures made from candies wrapped in cellophane. These pieces are often installed in the corner of galleries, against walls or in rectangular formations on the floor in ways that interact with or echo the existing architecture. The candies can be taken away and eaten by visitors during the course of the exhibition. This means that the sculpture diminishes in size and changes in shape over time. These pieces have been read as representations of the effect of AIDS on the body, which loses weight and withers over time. Works such as “Untitled (Lover boys)” (fig.8) can be seen as

abstractions of the body in which it is represented by a weight of candies. The titles of the candy pieces take on significance in the age of AIDS e.g. “Untitled (Chemo)” or “Untitled (Bloodworks)” referring to medical processes associated with cancer treatment and HIV testing at a time before effective HIV drugs had been developed. There is juxtaposition between the morbid subject matter and the saccharine material used to address it. In an interview with Robert Nickas Gonzalez-Torres explains this strategy “When information you’re used to getting in a particular medium suddenly shifts to another, you realize there’s a break in the narrative” (2006, p49). Amada Cruz describes Gonzalez-Torres’ work as “an art of blank spaces and things left unsaid” (2006, p49). As narrative sculpture his work differs from other representational practices that employ the figure or illustrate a written source. The work employs metaphors and poetic associations in order to invoke melancholy associations in the viewer:

A strong romantic impulse runs throughout Gonzalez-Torres’ oeuvre, and the most beautiful of his works have a wistful, melancholy quality (Cruz, 2006, p56).

This is evident in works such as “Untitled (Loverboy)” (fig.9) a diaphanous blue curtain that occupies a window in the gallery. The curtain is light enough to move in the breeze of a body traversing the space. There is something hesitant about it. The way it tints the view out the window adds distance and nostalgia. These are the poetics of Felix Gonzalez-Torres. He uses a range of spatial devices in order to address the sadness of AIDS. His works are elegiac. This has become the truism of discussing Gonzalez-Torres and subsequent artists have aped such visual strategies.



Fig.8. Gonzalez-Torres, Felix (1991). *Untitled (lover boys)* [Candies individually wrapped in silver cellophane, endless supply. Ideal weight: 355lbs]. Installation view at the MAC, Belfast.



Fig.9. Gonzalez-Torres, Felix (1989). *Untitled (Loverboy)* [Blue fabric and hanging device, dimensions variable]. MAC, Belfast.

Gonzalez-Torres brings information about AIDS into visual art via the predominant minimal visual codes of the day. He brings into a Minimalist vernacular images (for example photographic seascapes on stacks of paper) and narratives that were not permissible within the rules of high Minimalism (Fried, 1998). In an interview with Tim Rollins Gonzalez-Torres says, "I love formal issues. Actually they have a very specific meaning. Forms gather meaning from their historical moment. The Minimalist exercise of the object being very pure and very clean is only one way to deal with form" (Rollins, 2006, p74). Doubles abound in the work of Gonzalez-Torres - clocks, hoops, ponds, stacks and mirrors – serving formal and narrative purposes simultaneously. In "Untitled (perfect lovers)" (fig.10) two clocks are pressed up beside each other, ticking in unison. In lieu of figures the objects in Gonzalez-Torres' world become stand-ins for them. This is a quasi-Minimalism that bastardises the aesthetic principles of Robert Morris, Agnes Martin and others and repurposes it towards storytelling. Gonzalez-Torres was queering Minimalism. His oeuvre comprises formal arrangements that pay homage to the Minimalism of Sol Lewitt (e.g. stacks of paper arranged in descending height from the wall to the floor) and also pay homage to the conceptual art of Lawrence Weiner in terms of the ephemeral or gallery-challenging modes of production and material use. Robert Storr suggests that Gonzalez-Torres cross-references Minimalism, Dada and Neo-Dada in his work (Storr, 2006, p25). The hybrid approach to form and subject within his work "confronts the conventions of how an artwork functions" (Cruz, 2006, p55). Gonzalez-Torres' candy pieces are not only poetic ruminations on AIDS they are also ingenious institutional critique for the way in which they play with the conventions of the museum and gallery:

Gonzalez-Torres paper stack sculptures and his candy and cookie pieces...extend this examination of wanting and having into the realm of art where the tensions between covetousness and ownership, cash value and use value are exacerbated by mythologies of uniqueness and ideologies of transcendently useless and intangible worth (Storr, 2006, p16).

Ownership of Gonzalez-Torres' work rests in the hands of the collector, who purchases the rights to stage the work, and to the public, who can take a

souvenir away with them – if not a candy then a sheet of paper or other infinitely reproduced multiple. The rules for installing these pieces allow for the authorship of the work to be made partly by the viewer and the curator:

Felix Gonzalez-Torres gives the viewer the opportunity to change or rearrange the form of the works presented, even to the point of making them temporarily disappear, all with a view to revealing and fulfilling the complex semantics of the work (Bourriaud, 1998, p105).

The participatory nature of Gonzalez-Torres' work meant that Nicolas Bourriaud incorporated him into his theory of relational art as a kind of father figure. His work challenges “the longstanding investment in the art object as a premier and exclusive site of artistic meaning” (Bourriaud, 1998, p286). Despite the relational strategies at the core of Gonzalez-Torres' practice museums, such as the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC, have emphasised the material nature of the artist's work and an auction in 2010 saw a candy piece sell for \$4.5million (Chayka, 2010).

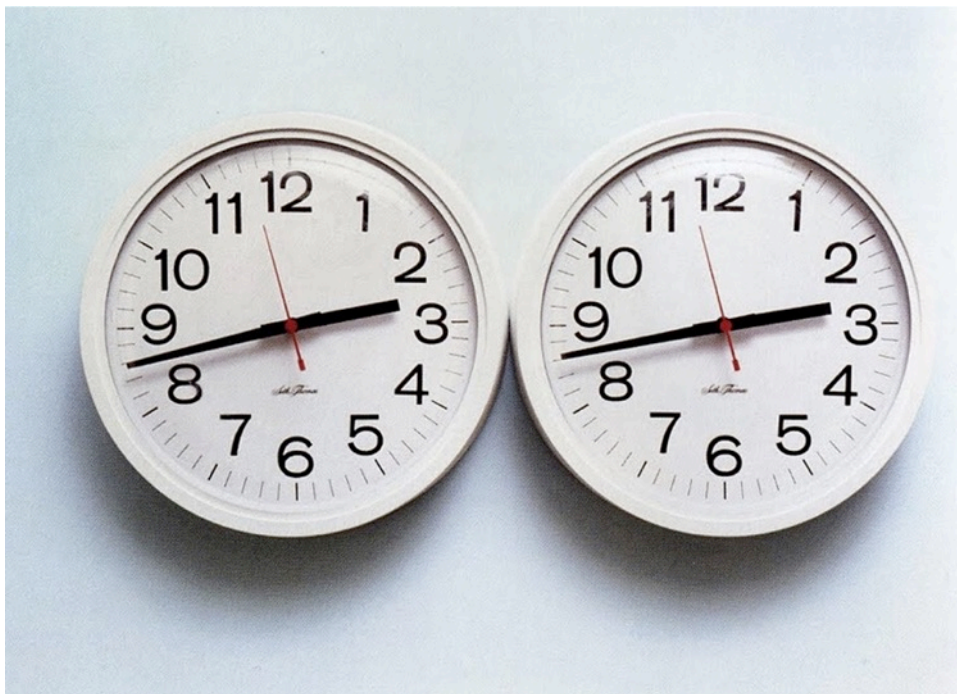


Fig.10. Gonzalez-Torres, Felix (1990). *Perfect Lovers* [Wall clocks, overall 34.3 x 68.6 x 3.2 cm].



Fig.11. Gonzalez-Torres, Felix (1989). *Untitled* [Site specific commemoration of the stonewall riots produced for the Public Art Fund of New York City].

Elements of the narrative surrounding Gonzalez-Torres' work have become clichés that have been applied by later artists to ascribe their work cultural value. The narrative of Gonzalez-Torres' work repeatedly involves mention that the artist collapsed personal and private and broke with sexual and racial stereotypes. On the gay stereotype:

Gay art, in the previous decades defined by artists like Johns, Rauschenberg, and Warhol, was replaced by a dominant practice of homoerotic pinups. Gonzalez-Torres refused this (and every other) gay stereotype as repressive and, moreover, as playing directly into the hands of the homophobic ultraright. Instead, he adopted a strategy of subverting received forms of high culture, *i.e.* minimalism, conceptualism, et al (Baltz, 2006, p211).

Gonzalez-Torres' work sits in contrast to other historical examples of gay art by refuting camp and pornography and in so doing offers appeal to a straight as well as a gay audience. Discussion of his work also celebrates the way in which he chose to contradict the image of the Hispanic artist as colourful and flamboyant:

At the point at which Gonzalez-Torres began his career – the late 1980s – a very serious cultural shift was underway. The institutions of the American art world were at long last beginning to recognize that artists of colour existed, and to pay their work something more than lip service (Ferguson, 2006, p85).

So as much as Gonzalez-Torres was using straight-acting as a method for introducing difficult subjects into the museum perhaps he was also playing with race in relation to Minimalism as a way of bringing non-white artists within the canon. As with *General Idea*, Gonzalez-Torres' work grew out conceptual and minimal aesthetics in order to develop a new type of institutional critique:

Minimalism was widely perceived to be the most rigorous, the most demanding, and the most serious of styles. Indeed, it was perhaps the last movement to achieve general recognition as *inescapable* for serious artists, even if they chose to position themselves in opposition to it. For artists of Gonzalez-Torres' generation, it was minimalism that held the dominant position occupied for an earlier generation by abstract expressionist painting (Baltz, 2006, p91).

Gonzalez-Torres' work speaks to the work of the generation of artists before him who sought the formal limitation of their practice as a liberating factor for other concerns – often material or mystical or both. Gonzalez-Torres expands the discursive field of possibilities available within the New York art world of the time. Russell Ferguson discusses how the artist invaded Minimalism much as Rauschenberg and Johns had invaded Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s. The aesthetic approach that Gonzalez-Torres had to his subject matter also had political implications:

He compared his strategy here to that of a straight-acting gay man who could infiltrate the centres of power without being too-easily defined as merely oppositional (Baltz, 2006, p91).

Whilst in the short term this “straight-acting” approach allows for statements about AIDS and gay subjects to enter the discursive field of visual art it does so on terms laid down by others whilst leaving unchanged the framework of the discussion itself. Gonzalez-Torres' work remains indexical to and thus

subservient to the institutions that police it. His approach is opposed to the activism of ACT UP that seeks reform from the top down. The argument cited for Gonzalez-Torres' aesthetics is that it employs a quietness that confronts, as David Deitcher puts it, the "pyrotechnics and instantaneous gestalt of large – or even small – scale advertising art" (Deitcher, 2006 p202). It is as though Gonzalez-Torres takes a perverse position within AIDS aesthetics to stage something quiet. Gonzalez-Torres deals with gay and AIDS subjects that institutional culture of the day could not easily digest by delivering it costumed as formalism. His work does not perform political agitation, it does not heroise the victims of AIDS and it does not moralise. Simon Watney argues that Gonzalez-Torres' presentation of the aesthetic and political structures that limit the discussion of AIDS is enough:

He has consistently drawn attention to the discursive formations which frame policy and practice in relation to the everyday lives of gay men in the AIDS epidemic (Watney, 1994, p333).

Gonzalez-Torres frequently employed a deadpan voice in order to deliver emotionally loaded messages. His site specific commemoration of the stonewall riots produced for the Public Art Fund of New York City in 1989 (fig.11) is a billboard that bears the text "People With AIDS Coalition 1985 Police Harassment 1969 Oscar Wilde 1895 Supreme Court 1986 Harvey Milk 1977 March on Washington 1987 Stonewall Rebellion 1969." Written in white along the bottom of the an otherwise black visual field this list of dates and figures jarred with the other signage, street furniture and advertising that it was competing with for attention. It is a decidedly less didactic approach to the subject than that of ACT UP.

A number of artists from the 1990s onwards have developed what has solidified into a genre in which Minimalism and queer subjects are aligned in the tradition of Gonzalez-Torres. I will refer to this genre as Queer Minimalism. Genre is less discussed in contemporary art compared to movements of the early 20th century or the convention of genre painting that preceded it. Ralph Cohen (1986)

identifies that genre enters discourse in the 19th century, before which “kinds” or “species” were referred to. Different genres reflect different cultural ideologies. Different situation types are discernable to members of a particular culture, which can ascribe genre status to a particular set of conventions. Within the context of HIV/AIDS and the work of Gonzalez-Torres this means a consensual discursive domain in which an audience may associate a Minimalist vernacular and an emotionally and politically charged range of queer subjects as shorthand. It is this set of generic conventions that I will consider as Queer Minimalism. Furthermore, Cohen argues that “genre concepts in theory and practice arise, change, and decline for historical reasons” (Cohen, 1986, p204). Just as Gonzalez-Torres realigned a Minimalist vernacular to address AIDS so subsequent artists including Hamad Butt, Elmgreen & Dragset, Christopher Aque, Nicolas Deshayes, George Henry-Longly and Prem Sahib have evolved a new genre of sculpture that has grown out of Gonzalez-Torres’ Minimalism.

British artist Hamad Butt, who died in 1994, worked with industrial materials and found objects to develop a sculptural practice that addressed the body as a mystical site. As with Gonzalez-Torres, Butt embeds narrative within Minimalism. In “Familiars” (fig.12) he creates a Newton’s cradle of glass jars that contain iodine crystals. Butt’s title refers to the familiars of witches - the animals that accompanied them. His cradle is a toxic game of risk that makes analogies between sculptural equilibrium and sexual infection. Writing in Frieze the curator Stuart Morgan asks of Butt’s work “Is there an underlying suggestion that inhabiting a body is only one among a number of alternatives and that eventually physicality itself, not to mention terms like ‘body’ and ‘soul’ will have outlived their usefulness?” (Morgan, 1994, no page number). Within the context of AIDS each of Butt’s “Familiars” is a lost soul. Butt’s work makes alchemical allusions that bring to mind Duchamp’s “Large Glass” (1915-23) and the relationships that he established between mechanical images and the body.



Fig.12. Butt, Hamad (1990). *Familiars Part 3 (cradle)* [Chlorine, glass, steel wire].

Twenty years later London-based, French born, sculptor Nicolas Deshayes employs traditional sculptural processes such as casting and vacuum-forming and combines them with contemporary plastics, resins and neoprene foam to make works that frequently address gay cruising for sex. In “Public Material” (fig.13) the artist composes a range of different sized panels, some appropriated from public toilet manufacturing, into a wall-based work that is interspersed with smaller frames containing casts of sagging and slumping foam. It is a broken triptych in which one panel is separated from a main pair – pink, grey and turquoise. The smaller inserted frames on the larger paired panels overlap each other. There is a play between opaque cream-coloured casts and milky-white translucent ones. There is a play in the materials between the sanitary and the abject. The material properties of the sculpture help generate narratives associated with cruising in public toilets (cottaging) – in an anthropomorphised narrative the one panel is a voyeur on the other two that are involved in a sexual exchange. The slumped foam panels become stand-ins for bodies and bodily fluids. In “Public World 1” (fig.14) a stainless steel model of a urinal is mounted to the wall and clear vinyl stickers have been placed to represent urine trails.

Again, bodies are absent. The piece alludes to Andy Warhol's oxidation paintings in which people would urinate on copper that would lead to patches of corrosion. Deshayes copies the straight-acting strategy of Gonzalez-Torres. He codifies gay subjects within presentable minimal drag. Whereas Gonzalez-Torres was using formal means to deliver difficult subject matter Deshayes is doing the reverse. His interest in cruising functions as a narrative hook upon which a series of formal games can be played. Deshayes' work exemplifies the depoliticisation of gay, queer and HIV subjects within which ASC seeks to intervene by altering the representational framework of the discussion.



Fig.13. Deshayes, Nicolas (2011). *Public Material* [Vacuum-formed plastic, public amenity panelling, aluminium and neoprene foam, 255 x 230 x 30cm].



Fig.14. Deshayes, Nicolas (2009). *Public Work 1* [Stainless steel and clear vinyl].
Zabludowicz Collection.

Prem Sahib is another young sculptor working in London today who operates at the fulcrum of queer narrative and Minimalist arrangement. He most encapsulates what I term Queer Minimalism. Since graduating from the Royal Academy Schools in London in 2013 Sahib has exhibited widely and received a lot of attention both from the art press and the popular media for his work and life. Discussion of Sahib frequently addresses his being mixed race – having a Polish catholic mother and Indian father and that his father and uncles have often been involved in the fabrication of his work (Wright, 2013, no page number). This commentary reminds me of the emphasis placed on the discussion of ethnicity surrounding Gonzalez-Torres. It also frames fabrication culture within a narrative of the family, which re-personalises the practice and mollifies discussion of Sahib’s being queer. In 2015 he had a solo show at the ICA in London titled *Side On*, which showcased new work alongside work made since graduating. Beside his artistic practice Sahib collaborates with fellow artists George Henry-Longly and Eddie Peake on a gay club night called “Anal House

Meltdown” (AHMD). AHMD becomes a crucial part of the discourse around his work and he courts the subject of disco as a framework for thinking about his sculpture, referring here to the disco sucks movement of the late 1970s:

...but there is a sense of me really connecting to and empathising with those politics. I find it deeply moving what happened. What I enjoy about it most is that its politics were its pleasure principle, and I like this idea of something being able to be political without waving the flag of politics with a capital P. It was born of real desires and a real want to create a safe space for people — queer, black, white, everything (Luke, 2015, no page number).

Sahib assumes a connection between disco and queer. His take on disco is retrospective and Romantic. His work revives a 1990s aesthetic epitomised by Gonzalez-Torres. His re-reading of Gonzalez-Torres in our current period of effective HIV treatments and aesthetic pluralism forces the emergence of Queer Minimalism as a new genre:

...genres have popular and polite functions and statuses. Generic transformation can be a social act (Cohen, 1986, p216).

The political agency of Sahib’s retrospective commentary is ambivalent. However, his work represents a broader resurgence of interest in disco music and the place of the disco as a queer and potentially activist space. This has been demonstrated in recent critical surveys of the club scene of the 1980s and 1990s including the exhibition *Party Out of Bounds: Nightlife as Activism* (Colucci and Yerebakan, 2015) and the book by Fiona Buckland from which it draws inspiration *Impossible Dance. Club Culture and Queer World Making* (Buckland, 2002). Buckland’s survey re-evaluates the culture and spaces of clubbing and dance music of the 1980s:

Some participants wanted to see these spaces as prepolitical configurations of community that could blossom into political agency outside (Buckland, 2002, p86).

Sahib’s reference to the disco in his work parallels Buckland’s observations of how the club functions for some queers. However, this critique may overly

romanticise the club and falsely ascribe political power to the confluence of people in attendance. Sahib's work hinges on the narrative that the pleasure collected within the gay club amounts to a form of activism that has the potential to spill out into the broader world.



Fig.15. Sahib, Prem (2015). *Sweat Panel* [Resin on aluminium panel]. Installation view, ICA London.



Fig.16. Sahib, Prem (2015). *Side On* [Matte and gloss black tiles]. ICA London.

The work of Prem Sahib is characterised by nostalgia for the art and culture of the 1980s and 1990s. There is nostalgia for cruising in a time before Grindr and the Internet and nostalgia for AIDS and a time when there was a requirement of art to operate as activism. Much is made of the absence of bodies in the artist's work: "The ghosts of absent bodies stalked Prem Sahib's debut solo show at Southard Reid" (McLean, 2014, no page number). Sahib has mastered Gonzalez-Torres' technique for inducing melancholic responses in audiences. A series of "Sweat Panels" (fig.15) show small dots of resin on aluminium sheets to suggest condensation on the wall of a club caused from dancing bodies. In an on going series of tiled columns alludes to the spaces of cruising for sex, such as public toilets, saunas and gay bathhouses, in a de-figuration of the genre that replaces risk with pleasure as the main focus of the investigation.

...the gay aspect of the work is thrilling and affirmative to anyone who's found themselves cruising in loos, losing themselves on a dancefloor (preferably Berghain) or lounging listlessly in an odd sauna (Brumfitt, 2015, no page number).

Sahib's architectural works allows viewers to live vicariously without the dirt, risk or predation of the bathhouse. They are non-didactic and morally ambivalent. A black tiled sculpture from the ICA show (fig.16) suggests the kind of doorway you might find within a gay sauna. It is fronted with matte tiles and then glossy tiles line the inside. As with the "Sweat Panels" this shift in the textural register connotes an atmospheric change from dry to wet. A single column covered in cream tiles is titled "Watch Queen" and refers to the "men in cruising situations who don't actively participate; they're just looking out, so they are voyeurs, looking for action unfolding and keeping a watch for anything that might interrupt it" (Brumfitt, 2015, no page number). He practices within the genre in which an unspoken agreement has been made between artist and audience to interpret a particular mode of sculptural practice as indexing a particular set of identity politics. Sahib's practice is a "de-figuration" (Rancière, 2009, p82) in Rancière's sense, of Gonzalez-Torres' work. Sahib's work bifurcates from the trajectory of Gonzalez-Torres and demands reclassification.

Cohen establishes two different definitions of genre - one that identifies certain markers as the tenets of a particular genre and an alternate definition in which the genre is a contract between the artist and the audience – this latter one being an economic reading of genre. The market that has developed around Gonzalez-Torres' work posthumously has become the starting point in which Sahib positions objects within the gallery - liberated from relational aesthetics and conscious of the art market. Claims that he has brought the bodily within the minimal are revisionist:

From a distance Sahib's work evokes American minimalism in its cool, crisp aesthetic and functional materials. But up close, unlike minimalism, they're loaded with content (Luke, 2015, no page number).

Sahib's puffa jacket works – in which cheap coats from UNIQLO are framed between panes of glass to imply bodies pressed up against one another in a club – draws formally on Duchamp's "Large Glass", re-framed within a gay context. De-figuration of art history is a leitmotif of Sahib's work. In his 2014 exhibition *Night Flies* at Southard Reid Gallery Sahib slumped the kind of black, wipe-down mattress one might find in a gay sauna against a ledge upon which was placed a glass of water (fig.17). This gesture makes a strong reference to conceptual artist Michael Craig Martin's glass of water "An Oak Tree" (1973).



Fig.17. Sahib, Prem (2013). *Night Flies* [Mattress and glass of water]. Southard Reid Gallery, London.

Discussion of Sahib's work focuses on it being "minimal and precise in execution, but loaded with possible meaning" (Luke, 2015, no page number). His is the art of the pregnant pause. It has become a truism of the discourse surrounding the artist's work that it is a paradoxical marriage of visual emptiness and emotional enormity:

Sahib's uncanny ability to release great feeling from a language of sometimes clinical austerity (McLean, 2014, no page number).

The rhetoric around Sahib borrows from the discussion of Gonzalez-Torres' work. Sahib performs Minimalism, double-voicing it through Gonzalez-Torres and the Minimalists that he drew on including Robert Morris. In reviewing the ICA show Francesca Dama claims Sahib's work as a critique of Minimalism:

On the ground floor of the ICA, the two-part sculpture "Called Out" (2015) is a variation on the artist's pillars, and would resemble Robert Morris's "L-Beams" (1965) if it wasn't for its dimensions — Sahib's works are less imposing than Morris's — and surfaces. In fact, the quality of the surface is a key element in Sahib's works. If the reference to the hypermasculine aesthetics of Minimalism — with its phallic shapes and clean lines — is

undeniable, Sahib's installations represent a significant shift within that paradigm. The pillar sculptures are covered in generic tiles that draw all the attention to their shining surfaces and playful reflections (Dama, 2015, no page number).

Lynda Benglis made a better critique of gender performativity in the 1970s when she placed an advert in Artforum parodying a female pinup wearing sunglasses and a dildo (Poundstone, 2011, no page number). Dama misses, or chooses to ignore, that Sahib is not making a commentary on Robert Morris's iteration of Minimalism but Gonzalez-Torres' re-visioning of it during AIDS. Discussion of Sahib's work simulates the discourse of the 1980s in which Gay Rights, feminism and AIDS were hotly contested subjects that intersected. In "Two Dots" (fig.18) the artist places two translucent acrylic circles on a white shelf. The title and formal arrangement of the piece represents a positive result from a rapid HIV test. One critic has read this as an "explicit" queer statement (Luke, 2015, no page number). Such a measure suggests a conservative turn within the art world. Difficult subjects such as HIV are now required to be codified and hidden within formalism. Gonzalez-Torres' straight-acting has become the norm for artists working within this area. The "stern formal language" (Dama, 2015, no page number) of Sahib's work does not achieve the same aesthetic force as that of Gonzalez-Torres because of the changed historical context within which Sahib is making his visual statements.

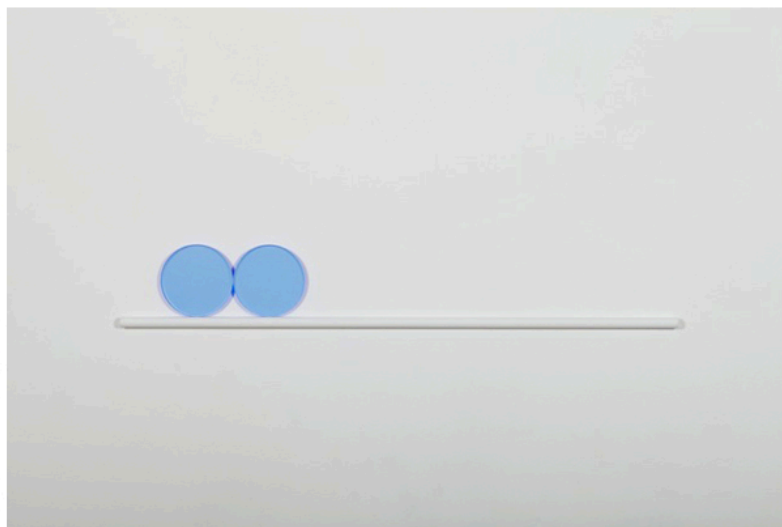


Fig.18. Sahib, Prem (2013). *Two Dots* [Aluminium, paint, acrylic, 11 x 100cm].

1.4 The appropriation of activist and queer art into the mainstream

Prem Sahib's work represents the academicisation of the queer. In her book *Ugly Feelings* Sianne Ngai argues that in the early 20th century modernist artists had to address blackness in order to give their work credibility in the form of primitivism etc. (Ngai, 2007, p177). In the early 21st century queerness has replaced 'blackness' as the seal of approval needed by artists, whether or not they are in fact queer. Two artists that evince this trait are American Jordan Wolfson and British Eddie Peake.

In his 2014 article "Poser Punks" Jonathan P Watts addressed a disjunction between a memorial service to commemorate what would have been artist Derek Jarman's 72nd birthday had he not died of AIDS in 1994 and a video installation "Raspberry Poser" at The Chisenhale Gallery in London by Jordan Wolfson. Watts describes an "intergenerational rift" between those who lived through the AIDS crisis of the 80s and those who came after. Wolfson's "Raspberry Poser" (figs.19-20) is a video featuring an animated HIV that appears to dance through SoHo in New York. The video features a soundtrack composed of a slowed down version of Beyoncé's "Sweet Dreams", lowering her voice and adding a sinister feel to the lyrics. Cartoon images of a boy eviscerating himself are montaged together with art historical references to Caravaggio and an animated condom full of love hearts spilling its way through the city. In an interview with the curator of the show Wolfson describes his use of HIV as "just a little mechanical virus" (Chisenhale Gallery, 2013, no page number), suggesting that his indifferent use of the image mimics the virus' indifference to whom it infects. Wolfson removes existing meaning from the image within the aesthetic of AIDS. Watts suggests that the video presents "HIV as a poser" (Watts, 2014, no page number), insinuating by extension that Wolfson is a poser as well. He concludes, "If Wolfson has anxieties about his own private wealth, his own tendency for posturing, his own megalomaniac neuroses, the legacy of the AIDS crisis should not be a vehicle for this." Watts' own former tutor Simon Watney, a

specialist on the subject, has informed his sensitivity to the discourse of AIDS. This was an unusually polemic piece by the writer and equally unusual for critique within contemporary arts journalism. Watts observes “Actually this harbinger moves with insipid joylessness through now gentrified neighbourhoods that were once scenes of SoHo’s AIDS pandemic” (Watts, 2014, no page number), alluding to a larger problem of gentrification that Wolfson’s work represents.

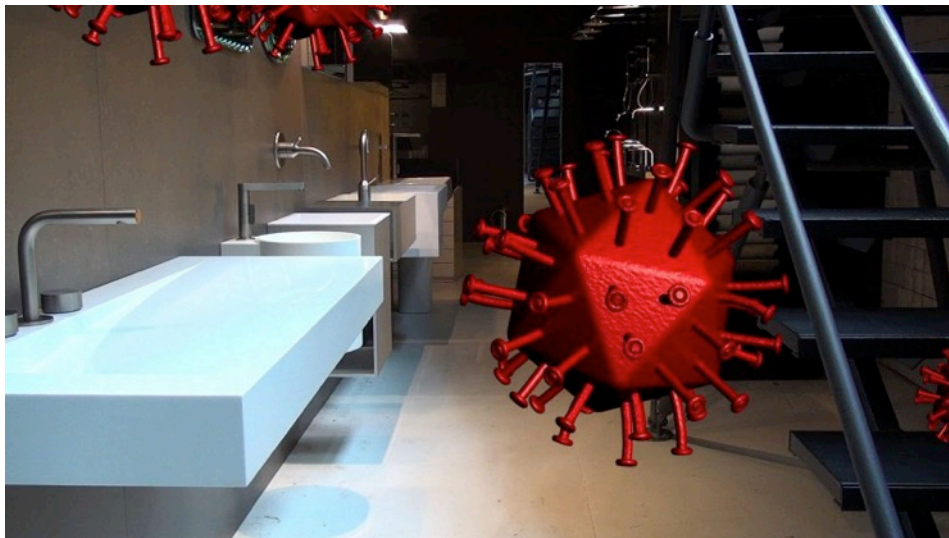


Fig.19. Wolfson, Jordan (2012). *Raspberry Poser* [Still from digital video, computer-generated imagery, hand-drawn animation, sound, 13' 55"].

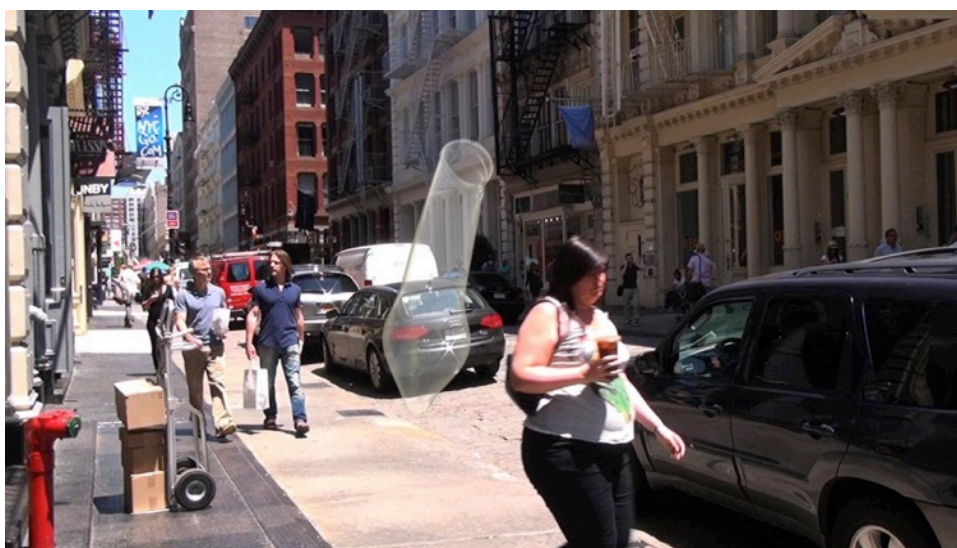


Fig.29. Wolfson, Jordan (2012). *Raspberry Poser* [Still from digital video, computer-generated imagery, hand-drawn animation, sound, 13' 55"].

In her book *The Gentrification of the Mind* Sarah Schulman addresses the financial and social transformations that have occurred in New York since the start of the AIDS crisis. Schulman's book is like a counterpart to Wolfson's installation in which she reminds us that "pretending away the deaths of 540,436 adults and 5,369 children from AIDS in the United States of America (as of 2008) becomes a mammoth act of self-deception, with enormous consequences for our decency" (Schulman, 2013, pp50-51). "Raspberry Poser" appears to function as part of this misremembering of AIDS. The same is true of the comedian Josh Howie's 2015 show "AIDS - A survivor's Story," which showed at the Soho Theatre (fig.21); Howie, a straight, white man in his late thirties, narrated the audience through a fictionalised version of his childhood growing up around media representations of AIDS. His show traded on the scariness of AIDS and raised questions about who has the right to discuss the subject and how. It was a clumsy reminder that however invisible HIV/AIDS may now be in the West it has not been eradicated. Schulman reminds us that AIDS is not over (Schulman, 2013) and cites ACT UP and Gran Fury's installation at the New Museum in 1987 *Let The Record Show* to call for a permanent memorial to the AIDS dead. Schulman's anger about AIDS contrasts with Wolfson's ambivalence and diletantism on the subject. AIDS is a measure for Schulman of the racial and class transformations that have happened since 1980 due to gentrification:

We all know about white gay men coming into poor ethnic neighbourhoods and serving as economic "shock troops," buying and rehabbing properties, bringing in elite businesses and thereby driving out indigenous communities, causing homelessness and cultural erasure (Schulman, 2013, p39).

The gentrification of art has occurred in a parallel way. Artists such as Wolfson, Sahib, Peake et al have colonised previously politically active aesthetics and repurposed them for market gain. This process has been in part facilitated by the gentrification of the education system, which has privileged them both. Like Sahib, Peake is a graduate of the Royal Academy Schools in London, and both artists have become the poster boys for resurgence in the reputation of the institution as a barometer of taste. These artists represent the four

characteristics identified by Schulman as the “homogenised aesthetics” (Schulman, 2013, p100) of gentrification:

1. The homogenisation of influences – the canon of art
2. The cost of education
3. Ambition towards mainstream success
4. The professionalisation of creativity

Sahib’s concentration of the work of Gonzalez-Torres onto Queer Minimalism quickly feeds into his friend and colleague Peake’s appropriationist method. This is further capitalised within the professionally conscious environment of the RA schools, which seeks to link artists to dealers, collectors and galleries while they are students there. Commonly these artists have used being gay, or the performance of being queer, as a strategy for the colonisation previously anti-establishment cultural space by the institution. Watts observes of Wolfson that he is “mindful of flirting with a gay aesthetic” and the same is true of Peake. Watts poses the question “Are we in a post-identity, anything-goes world?” (Watts, 2014, no page number). However, I would suggest that we are in a world in which identity politics counts for more than ever leading to artists assuming the identity politics of others in order to accrue cultural and financial value for their work.

Eddie Peake’s recent solo exhibition at The Barbican Curve (fig.22) included performances by naked male and female dancers and a naked roller skater animating an otherwise static installation comprised of paintings, architectural interventions and videos (fig.23). By the artist’s own admission the naked performances are a loss leader for the commercial side of his practice, attracting critical attention and providing spectacle (Winship, 2015). Discourse around Peake addresses his genealogy (Buck, 2015) – his mother is successful artist Phyllida Barlow who in turn is the great granddaughter of Charles Darwin and his grandfather is Mervyn Peake the author of Gormenghast. An article in the Evening Standard epitomises the narrative of the enfant terrible the press often impose on Peake:

There is something of the naughty child about Peake's art, with its swearing and rave-culture references and nudity — his own website is just a fuchsia-tinged photo of his own penis (Winship, 2015, no page number).

His practice rehabilitates the shock tactics of the Young British Artists (YBAs), such as Damien Hirst's shark, but reframes them through identity politics. Whilst the nudity might not offend Peake (Brown, 2015) he knows it may offend many audience members and he plays on this for his own gain. Like the YBAs Peake's and Wolfson's objects emphasise slick production values. Others fabricate Peake's sculptures and Wolfson's animations. Both artists operate within the industry of the art world and participate fully in activating all parts of the hierarchy at once for economic gain. Peake's recent wall painting at Victoria Beckham's flagship store in Mayfair embodies the entrepreneurial and commercial spirit of the gentrified artist (fig.24). In the context of a highly polished interior of a fashion boutique Peake poses as graffiti artist.



Fig.21. Howie, Josh (2015). *AIDS A Survivor's Story* [Promotional poster]. Soho Theatre, London.



Fig.22. Peake, Eddie (2015). *The Forever Loop* [Installation, dimensions variable].
Barbican Curve, London.

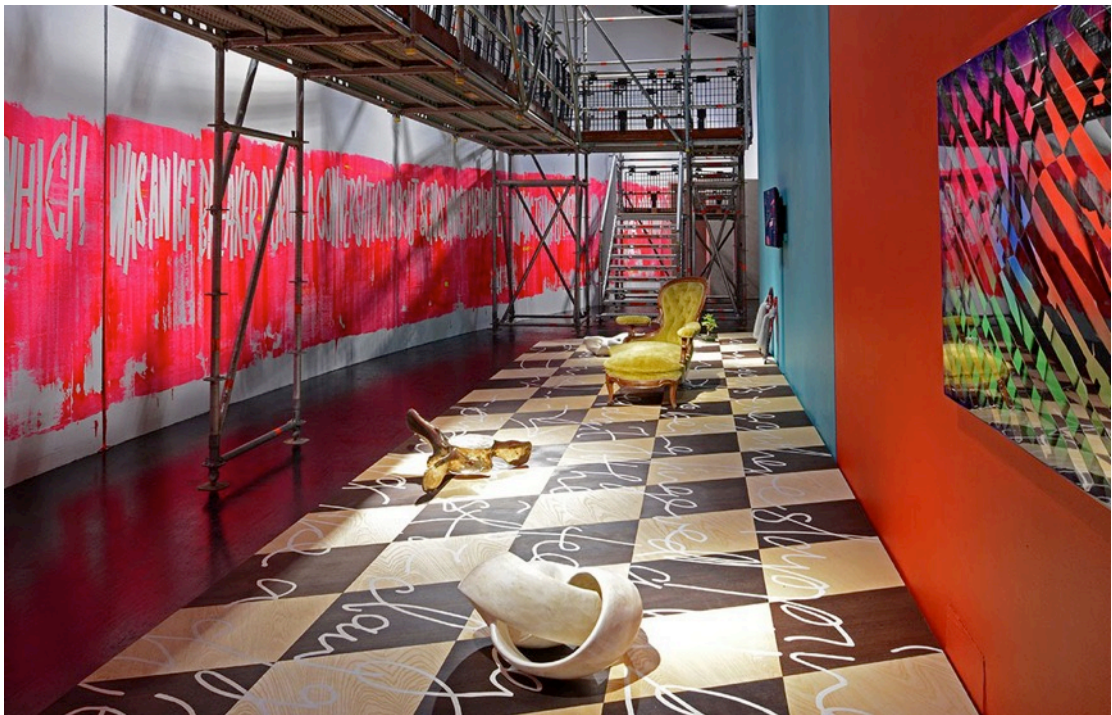


Fig.23. Peake, Eddie (2015). *The Forever Loop* [Installation, dimensions variable].
Barbican Curve, London.



Fig.24. Peake, Eddie (2015). *Many courgettes, an equal number of pellicles and very many fingers attached to fraught bodies and minds in tumult*. Victoria Beckham store, Mayfair, London.

Thus ASC is framed within a practice of HIV in visual art that has historically been conducted within the context of AIDS activism and Minimalism. By identifying how HIV and AIDS have been addressed in the past I ask whether it might be possible to invent a new way of representing the subject to take into account scientific, social and cultural changes that have occurred since the 1980s. ASC employs maximalism, spatial design and methods from live art to make new representations of HIV that contrast with the 1980s discussion of the subject. Contemporary artists have appropriated a 1980s activist aesthetic into the mainstream and devalued it. ASC positions itself against the work of Eddie Peake and Jordan Wolfson in order to reactivate art as a space in which HIV activism can happen by changing the aesthetic properties of that activism. ASC also changes how the virus is represented compared with contemporary and historical examples in order to shift how HIV is thought about and discussed.

2
The Science and Cultures of HIV

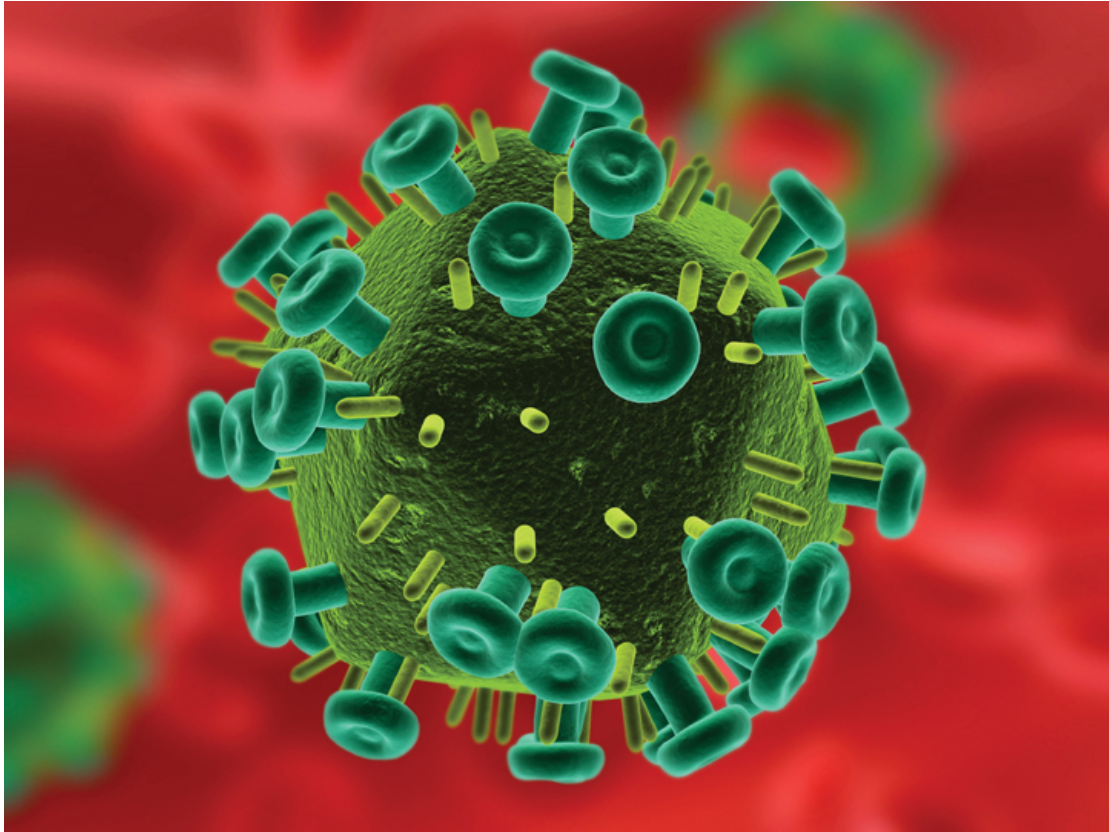


Fig.25. Kaulitzki, Sebastian (2015). *3D rendering of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) under the microscope*. Available from <https://www.grad.uiowa.edu/annual-report/2013/ernest-chivero> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

This chapter frames Alien Sex Club (ASC) within scientific knowledge about HIV that enables the representation of the subject to be updated. Thirty years after the start of the AIDS crisis rates of HIV infection amongst gay men are on the increase in the UK. Around 3500 new infections are recorded each year (fig.26) (Aghaizu et al. 2013). Approximately 500 of these are among men aged 25 or under (Skingsley et al. 2015). Around 3 infections per day are diagnosed at London's Dean Street clinic in Soho.¹ The reasons for this increase in infections during the 2000s, despite extensive public health campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s, is due to a cultural change in the perception of risk amongst gay men. The HIV problem is now a much more complex picture than it was at the outset of the AIDS crisis. In this essay I will give an account of the virus and the cultural

approaches to treating it, in order to build a picture of the challenge facing those trying to prevent the spread of the virus.

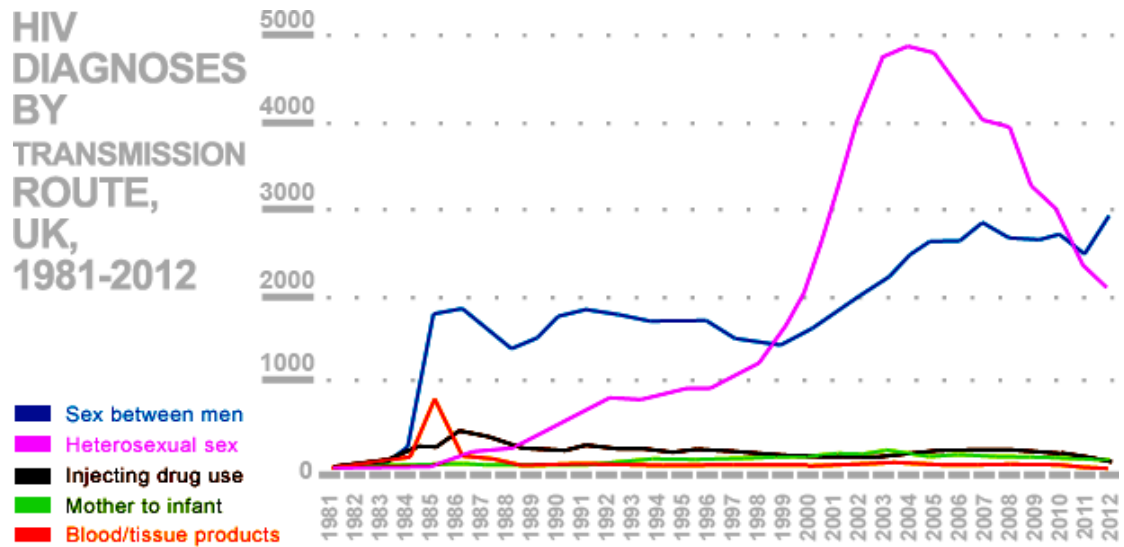


Fig.26. Book Med (2013). *UK HIV diagnoses by transmission route*. Available from <http://book-med.info/aids/42758> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

The emergence of a ‘gay plague’,² later to be known as AIDS, in the late 1970s and early 1980’s baffled scientists and devastated the gay community.³ It is now thought that HIV, the virus that goes on to cause the symptoms that are collectively known as AIDS, began infecting people in the early 1970’s and that the first cases that emerged at the end of the decade were in fact people in the late stages of HIV who had no idea that they had been living with the disease (Avert, 2016). In the early days of the AIDS crisis there was hysteria and panic as no one knew what the disease was, let alone how to treat it or prevent its spread. AIDS is a spectrum of diseases brought about by complications from the onset of the HIV virus, which I will define in detail later in the essay. It took on several names, including GRID (Gay Related Immune Deficiency) before the acronym AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) was agreed upon to describe the condition. The so-called “Tombstone Advert” on British television (fig.27) put fear into the public imagination by equating AIDS with death. In the early days this was a realistic equation, even if the propaganda was heavy-

handed. The popular imagination was then educated about HIV through mainstream media such as characters in soap operas, like Mark Fowler in *EastEnders* (fig.28), who portrayed living with the virus. Despite *EastEnders* containing a gay character at the time it was chosen that a straight character would take on the storyline. This could be read as an attempt to remove AIDS from the stigma of being an exclusively gay problem, despite the disease disproportionately affecting gay men in the UK. AIDS affected generations of gay men (Halkitis, 2013), many losing a large amount of friends and lovers, especially between 1980 and 1995. The history of the AIDS crisis is a story of gay rights, medical innovation and activism working hand in hand.



Fig.27. (left) UK Government (1986). *AIDS campaign (tombstone advert)*.

Television advertisement. Available from

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/panorama/4348096.stm> [Accessed 1

August 2016]. Fig.28. (right) BBC Television (1990-2003). *Todd Carty as HIV positive character Mark Fowler in EastEnders*. Available from

http://walfordd.wikia.com/wiki/Mark_Fowler [Accessed 1 August 2016].

In order to understand the risks associated with the virus it is useful firstly to understand how the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) works on a scientific level. The origins of HIV are currently believed to come from a strain of the virus found in chimpanzees, which it is likely was transferred to humans via exposure to infected blood from hunting in West Equatorial Africa earlier in the twentieth century (The AIDS Institute, 2011). The virus spread across Africa and then to

other parts of the world. HIV is transferred by blood, semen, pre-ejaculate, vaginal fluid or breast milk, although it is primarily a sexually transmitted disease. HIV enters the bloodstream and rapidly multiplies inside the body. Recently infected people are the most virulent, carrying high doses of the virus as it reproduces and spreads into the lymphatic system. Newly infected people commonly report a period of flu-like symptoms (though not in all cases) due to the immune system attempting to cope with the initial infection. The virus is measured in copies per cubic millilitre of blood. In the initial stages of infection, known as acute, this “viral load” can measure around 1 million copies per millilitre (I will give further explanation of these medical terms later in the chapter). This places undiagnosed people, and especially recently infected people, at a higher risk of transmitting the virus to others because they are more infectious since the body’s immune system has not been able to attack the virus sufficiently at this stage of infection. The virus replicates by infecting CD4+ lymphocytes (T-cells) (fig.529) and using them as hosts for the production of more virus particles. T-Cells are central to the regulation of the body’s immune system and once infected this function is lost thus reducing the body’s capacity to protect itself against disease and other infections. HIV is categorised as a ‘retrovirus’ because it attacks the immune system to enable infection from other sources.

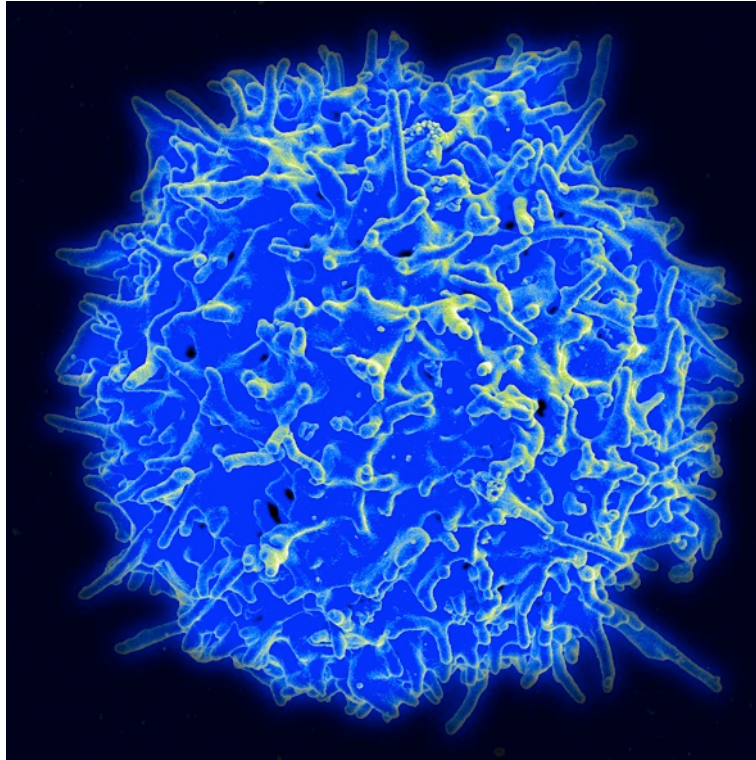


Fig.29. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (2010).
Scanning electron micrograph of a human T lymphocyte (also called a T cell) from the immune system of a healthy donor. Available from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Healthy_Human_T_Cell.jpg [Accessed 1 August 2016].

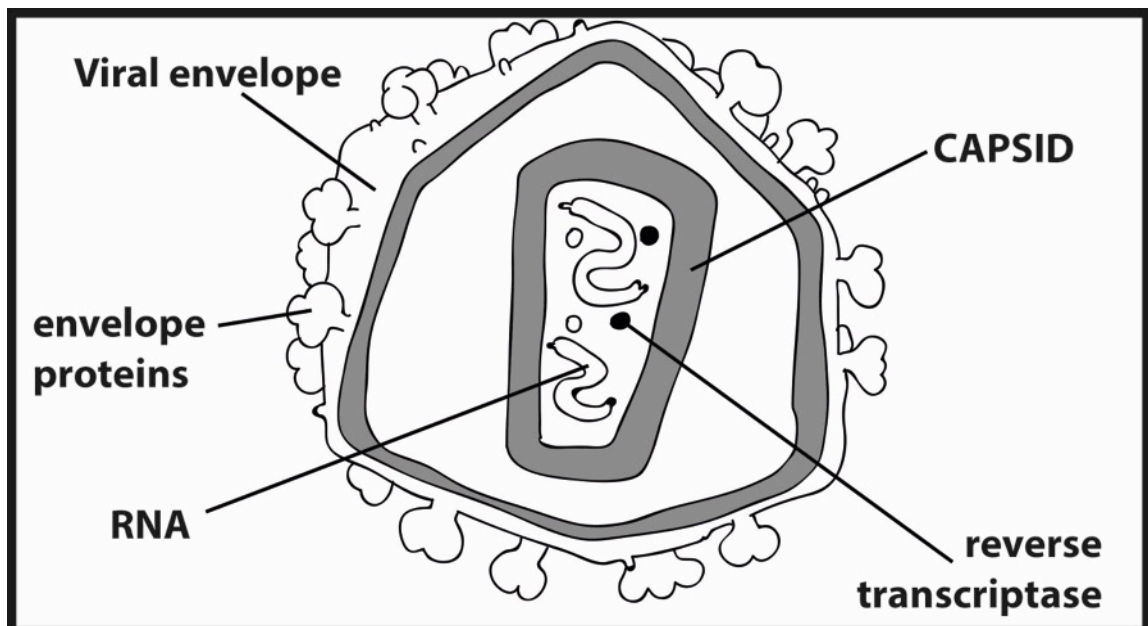


Fig.30. Walter, John, *Cross section through HIV*, 2014, digital drawing, collection of the artist, London.

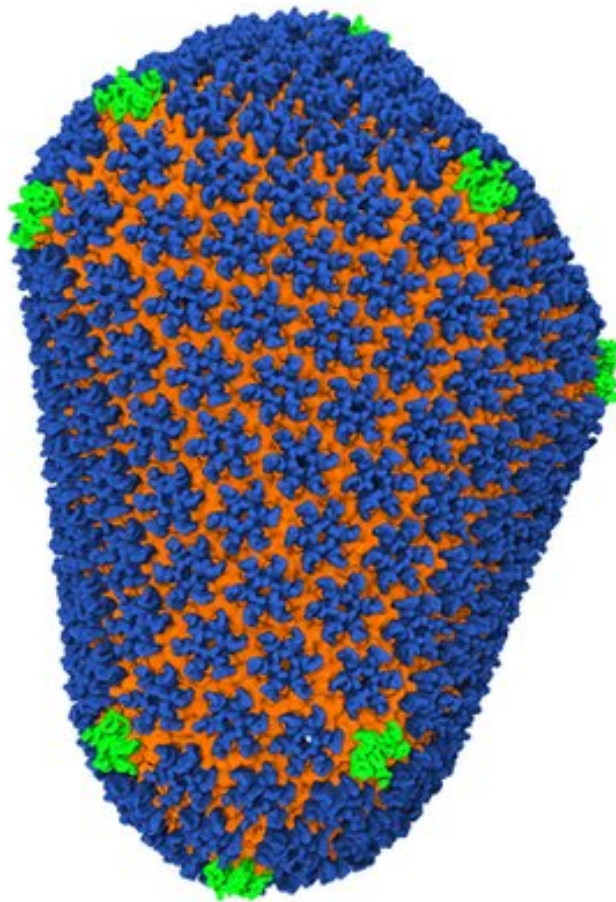


Fig.31. Zhang, Peijun (2013). *Computer model of HIV capsid structure*. Available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-22708437> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

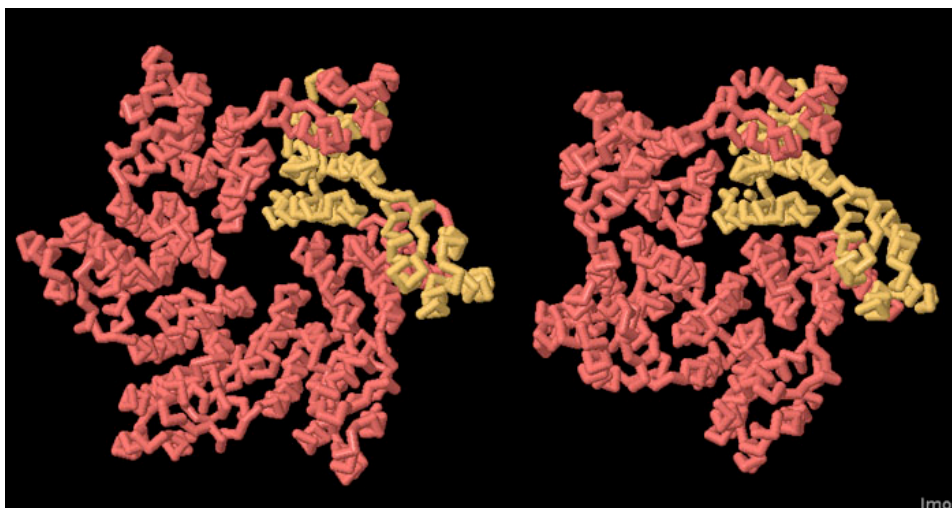


Fig.32. Protein Data Bank (2012). *Hexamer and Pentamer of HIV*. Available from <http://pdb101.rcsb.org/motm/163> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

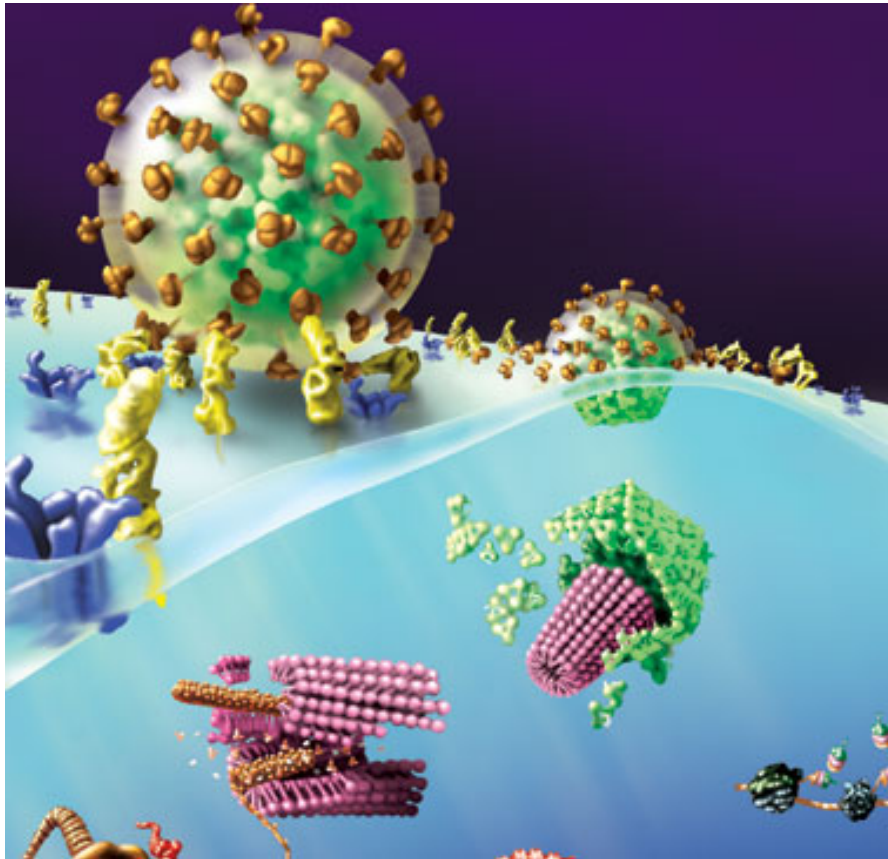


Fig.33. The HIV viral envelope delivers the capsid into the cell where it breaks up to release the genetic information for producing for HIV viruses. Available from <https://www.msi.umn.edu/~lifang/phcl4003.html> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

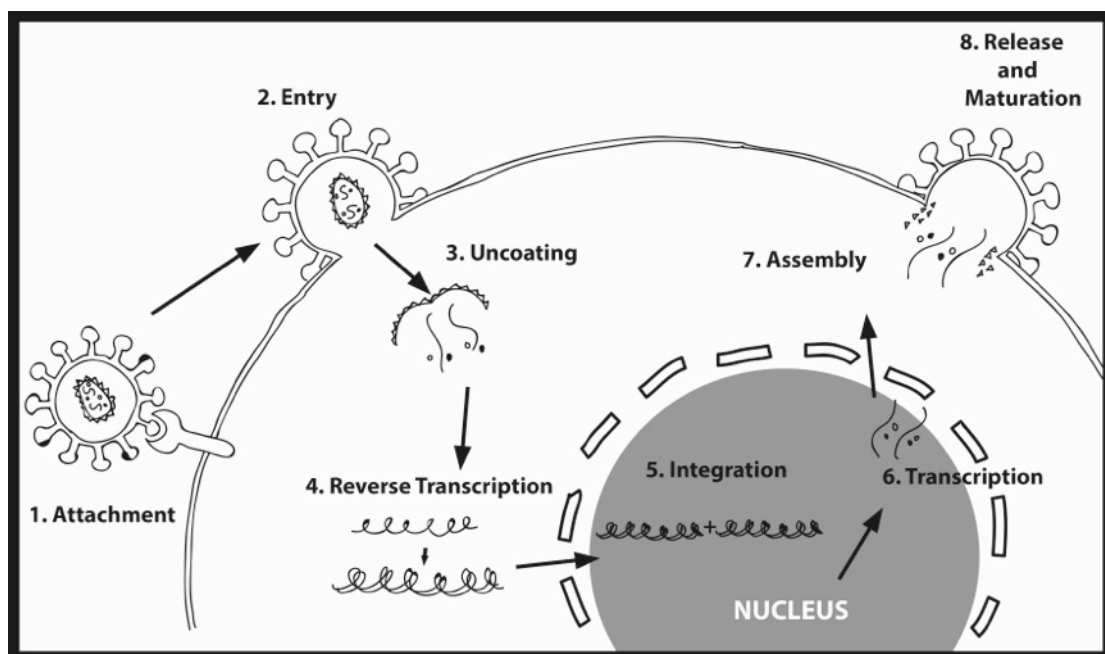


Fig.34. Walter, John (2014). *The life cycle of HIV, 2014* [Digital drawing].
Collection of the artist, London.

Virology, the study of viruses, has expanded greatly in the past 30 years, partly because of the challenge of understanding the structure of the HIV virus. Study of other viruses has also helped scientists understand the shape, growth and function of HIV. Viruses often grow as spirals, accounting for their complex geometries.

The process of HIV replication (fig.34):

1. Attachment

Beneath a microscope the HIV appears to be a geometric sphere covered in lumps (fig.25). This is the outer membrane, or viral envelope, of the virus (fig.30). Proteins on the surface of the virus dock with receptors on the surface of the cell, known as CD4 receptors (which in turn trigger CCR5 co-receptors), allow the virus to deposit its contents within the host cell by merging surfaces between the cell and the virus.

2. Entry

The virus membrane unfolds to release the capsid (fig.31) - a kind of viral kernel that contains the genetic information capable of infecting the cell. The HIV capsid is characterised by a complex geometry that has only been recently mapped by a group of scientists at the University of Illinois (Schulten and Perilla, 2013). It is made up of 12 pentamers (pentagonal shaped proteins) and around 250 hexamers (hexagonal shaped proteins) (fig.32). The shape of the capsid varies considerably depending on the arrangement of the pentamers. It is a highly organic looking shape but it is incredibly strong. It is not until it has entered into the cell that it begins to break up and release the genetic information that it is carrying to help rewrite the cell as an HIV production site.

3. Uncoating

The HIV capsid breaks apart, and is digested, inside the cell releasing 2 RNA strands (Ribonucleic acid; the building blocks for DNA) and other enzymes key to the HIV reproduction process (fig.33).

4. Reverse Transcription

The separate RNA strands from the capsid are catalysed into single strands of DNA by the Reverse Transcriptase enzyme, which then weaves the new single strands of DNA into a double helix DNA.

5. Integration

Another enzyme, known as Integrase, which was also delivered by the HIV capsid, takes the double helix DNA strand into the nucleus of the cell. Here the DNA is joined into that of the host cell, effectively rewriting it.

6. Transcription

An enzyme known as Polymerase reads the newly rewritten DNA and produces new single strands of RNA, which leaves the nucleus of the cell.

7. Assembly

These new RNA strands are catalysed by ribosomes to produce new cell membranes and viral proteins that form the key components of the new baby virus. They are sent to the surface of the host cell.

8. Release and Maturation

These various components (viral RNA, viral enzymes and structural proteins) form a bud, which leaves the host cell surface, taking receptor proteins with it to form a new virus cell in its own right. It will mature to form a viral envelope containing a capsid that will go on to infect another host cell in the body and repeat the process.

What is the difference between HIV and AIDS? HIV is measured according to two factors; the first is one's CD4 count – a count of the T-Cells/mm³ in the blood indicative of how well the body's immune system is doing; and the second is the viral load i.e. how many copies of the virus there are per millilitre of blood (fig.35). In an HIV-negative person the CD4 count is usually somewhere between 500 and 1600 cells/mm³ and their viral load is 0. Sero-conversion is a term that refers to the conversion of the blood from HIV negative to HIV positive. In a newly sero-converted person the viral load climbs steeply, to around one million copies per ml, as the virus replicates rapidly, concurrently the CD4 count drops as the virus attacks T-Cells. After the acute infection of the virus has passed (after around 6 months from infection) there is an improvement in the CD4

count and a reduction in the viral load due to the development of antibodies to the virus within the bloodstream. However, over time this gradually reverses, if untreated, as the HIV attacks the antibodies too. After several years the CD4 count of an untreated person has dropped to below 50 and the viral load can go into the millions per millilitre. The term AIDS refers to the particular point within the process of living with HIV in which the body's immune system has become critically weakened and open to opportunistic infection. If untreated the virus goes on to weaken a person's ability to fight disease until they die. Diseases including lymphoma, PCP (pneumocystis pneumonia), TB and Kaposi's sarcoma (fig.36) have become well known as so-called AIDS-related; such infections, which can easily be dealt with by a healthy immune system, are not capable of being fought by a body compromised by AIDS. Essentially HIV is a facilitator of simpler infections.

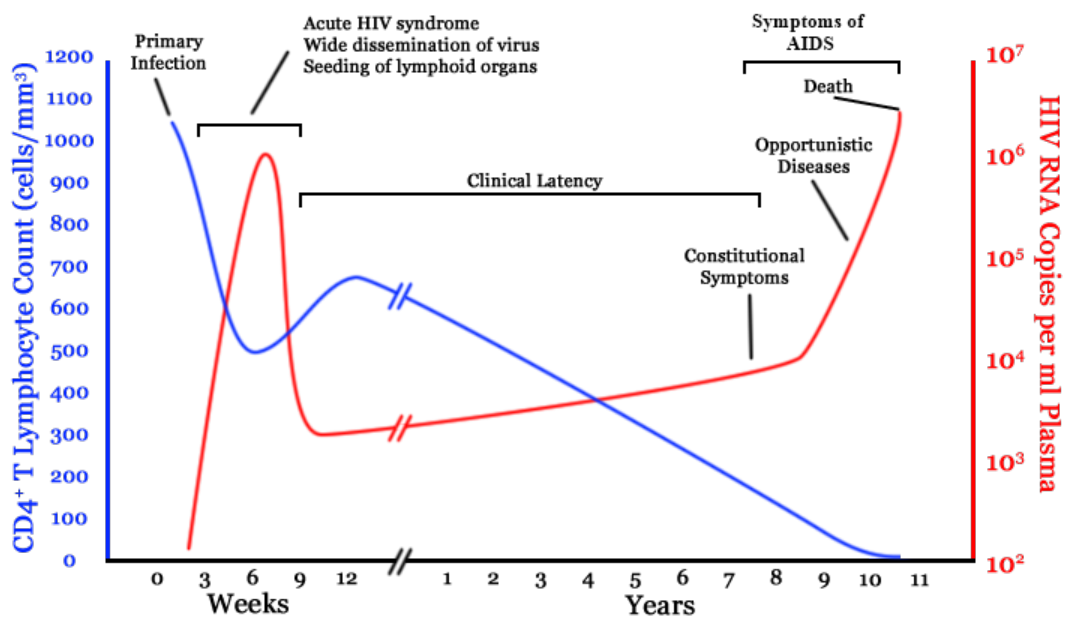


Fig.35. Health Hype (2010). *Graph demonstrating the relationship between measure of CD4 and viral load (count of HIV copies) in the blood from infection through to AIDS.* Available from <http://www.healthhype.com/cd4-count-dropping-viral-load-stable-in-hiv-infection-graph.html> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

AIDS was a disease whose rapid onset was matched only by the equally rapid media portrayal of it in print and on-screen. As Simon Watney has commented, and Leo Bersani has quoted (1987) newspapers, television and the arts all tried to keep up with the unfolding story of AIDS:

AIDS is not only a medical crisis on an unparalleled scale, it involves a crisis of representation itself, a crisis over the entire framing of knowledge about the human body and its capacities for sexual pleasure (Watney, 1987, p9).

Watney is alluding to the politics of the day, which were deeply conservative, and were stifling an adult discussion of the subject. Mainstream media did not explore the difference between HIV and AIDS and it didn't really know how to overcome its own latent homophobia. AIDS was a confluence of factors – both social and medical – that demanded a new method of thought and representation in order to address it. The muscle-wasting character of AIDS dominated the representation of the virus in the media during the early AIDS crisis. Images, such as Therese Frare's portrait of David Kirby on his deathbed, surrounded by his chubby American family (fig.37) were shocking. The frail figure in the bed, reminds me most closely of holocaust victims and prisoners of war. It may be that these images are intended to invoke these similarities in order to make AIDS patients more sympathetic.



Fig. 36. Medical Pictures Info (2016). *Kaposi's sarcoma*. Available from <http://medicalpicturesinfo.com/kaposis-sarcoma/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.37. LIFE Magazine (1990). *David Kirby on his deathbed by Therese Frare.*
Available from <http://time.com/3503000/behind-the-picture-the-photo-that-changed-the-face-of-aids/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

For the first ten years of the AIDS crisis there was no effective treatment for the virus and prevention became the best way of limiting its spread. Condom use was promoted amongst gay men as the best way of preventing the spread of HIV. Anal sex is considered a high-risk sexual activity, especially for the receptive partner, because the skin around the anus is particularly fragile and contains a large number of blood vessels – this makes unprotected sex dangerous if the insertive partner is HIV positive because the virus is transmitted by contact between bodily fluids – ejaculate or pre-ejaculate are most at risk of entering the blood stream from the top to the bottom in this scenario.⁴ Sex with a condom reduces the risk of fluid contact during anal sex. So-called safe sex became a mantra for gay men during the 1980's; this meant minimising risk. A hierarchy of activities from no risk (such as kissing) through to low risk (such as oral sex) (Page-Shafer, 2002) and high risk (anal sex) emerged and implanted itself within the canon of the gay sexual imagination. Sex and HIV became intrinsically linked; there was always fear and risk associated with sex. It became taboo to have sex without a condom and public health messages often used humour to

communicate difficult messages, such as this German safe sex advertisement (fig.38) – it reads: “always screw with a rubber...and kiss till your heart’s content”. The elegant graphic represents two gay men as plug sockets, the prongs of which are sheathed. Of course condoms could split during sex so it was always important (a) to know how to apply a condom properly and possibly more importantly (b) to know your HIV status and that of your partner.



Fig.38. AHS [AIDS-Hilfe Schweiz] (1990). *German Public Health campaign to use condoms in the fight against AIDS*. Available from <http://wellcomelibrary.org/item/b1674973x#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

HIV testing has changed and improved over the years. It is now possible to get a rapid HIV test that gives you a result within 5 minutes (fig.39). This rapid test involves pricking the finger of the person being tested and applying the blood to a solution that is poured onto a small pad, which after 5 minutes appears with either one or two blue dots – the former representing an HIV negative diagnosis and the later suggesting positive – in fact a further blood test will be made in the latter case in order to clarify the diagnosis. With all HIV tests there is a window of time that they cover, which does not include the very recent past. The HIV test measures the presence of antibodies to the virus and anything before 4 weeks from infection does not give a clear enough picture of HIV status (HIV i-Base, 2013). It is considered that testing after 12 weeks from possible exposure to HIV and producing a negative result is a long enough time to categorically diagnose a negative result. HIV testing centres and sexual health clinics adapted to be friendly and open places in order to encourage people to come and test regularly for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Furthermore, health professionals have taken HIV testing to the places where gay men have sex – parks, clubs, bars and saunas.⁵ This is part of an attempt to develop a culture in which people take responsibility for knowing their HIV status, getting treatment if they are positive and sharing their status with partner or acting on it accordingly.

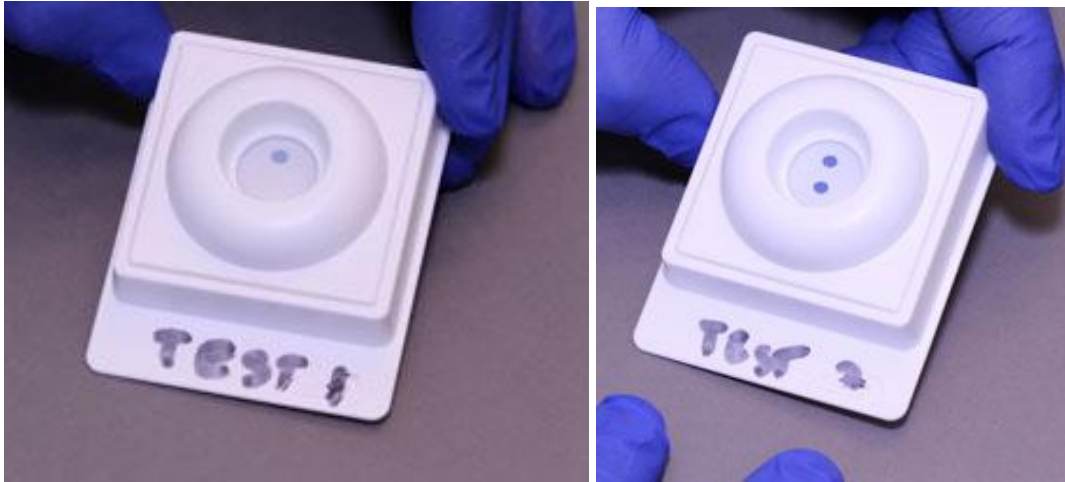


Fig.39. Smart Sex Resource (2014). *A rapid HIV pinprick test one dot (left) means no HIV detected two dots (right) suggest HIV has been detected and a further blood test to clarify the diagnosis will be required.* Available from <http://smartsexresource.com/topics/hiv-point-care-rapid-test> [Accessed 1 August 2016]..

It has been proven that the sexual transmission risk a person takes correlates to their sexual orientation. Many men who have sex with men do not define themselves as gay. If having sex with other men is independent of being gay for certain individuals then these same men may have a different perception of HIV risk than those who do identify as gay. The medical profession has coined the term MSM to encompass such bisexual and “men who have sex with other men” that do not necessarily identify as gay. In a study of MSM Hospers discovered that bisexual men were using condoms less and taking greater sexual risks in cruising areas than their gay counterparts:

...they found that a non-gay identity as well as low acculturation were strongly associated with lower condom use... (Hospers, 1999, p362).

Individuals that identify as gay are more likely to be exposed to a discussion of HIV than those who do not, since they are more likely to be part of a community with a shared knowledge of HIV. For gay men that have known people die of AIDS, or are living with HIV, the approach to risk may be very different to that of

MSM who do not. Gay acculturation may have a role to play in one's willingness to practice safe sex and test for HIV:

Bisexual men who hide their homosexual behaviours may have less access to information sources regarding HIV preventative homosexual behaviours... (Hospers,1999, p363).

For those MSM that are hiding their homosexual behaviours from a straight partner or are unwilling to address their homosexuality openly there is likely to be a corresponding lack of education about transmission risk. In the Hospers study there was a great deal of superstition surrounding prevention of HIV and what he calls "partner screening procedures" (Aveline, 1995, p204), referring to whether or not an individual asks the HIV status of their sexual partner - we may refer to this as testing verbally for AIDS. Similarly, a study by Aveline of MSM describes the "personal worlds of meaning" (Aveline, 1995, p205) encountered amongst many of the men surveyed. There is a lack of scientific understanding amongst these men about HIV and in place of such empirical knowledge about the virus they extrapolate on what they know to justify levels of risk as safe that may not be. Aveline identifies a greater deal of superstition amongst MSM around HIV transmission than there is amongst gay men:

...the selection of uninfected sex partners during cruising is not systematic, nor is it accurate (Aveline, 1995, p205).

Openly gay men are more likely to know about HIV testing and prevention through friends and gay media resources whereas MSM may not wish to engage with such media or have such friendships, since that would 'out' them or culturally reposition them in ways that they were uncomfortable with. For many MSM there are strict rules about what behaviours would constitute gay, such as kissing. The way in which an individual labels their sexual orientation locates them within larger cultural practices that may affect their health, or as Aveline puts it "...sexual behaviour was strongly related to sexual self-identification" (Hospers, 1999, p363). Furthermore, whether or not an individual is willing to disclose his HIV status may be due to a matter of stigma associated with the virus but it may also be due to a larger cultural homophobia that is latent and prevents

men from self-identifying as bisexual or gay. If homophobia was addressed would it mean that these men took less risk and acted more responsibly to prevent the spread of HIV? Hospers argues that “positive social norms towards safe sex are indeed related to safer sexual behaviour” (Hospers, 1999, p365) i.e. A reduction in homophobia within mainstream culture may have a role to play in reducing rates of HIV transmission.

Risk of HIV has become an expected part of sex for gay men. For many there has been a growing apathy towards the safer sex message over the past twenty years. Safer sex has been difficult to adhere to over a long period of time. Bareback sex, or unprotected sex, has become increasingly normalised having been frowned upon as risky during the early AIDS crisis. New methods for preventing the spread of HIV transmission have emerged such as sero-sorting (the choice of sexual partners based on their HIV status) or strategic positioning (adopting the insertive or receptive role during anal sex depending on your HIV status and that of your sexual partner). Being a bottom is the riskier position, as there is more chance of HIV infection than being the top (Cairns, 2013). Some blame the portrayal of bareback sex in pornography as a contributory factor to the increase in the activity (Wyatt, 2003). The representation of condomless sex has certainly had an effect on the collective gay sexual imagination and what it thinks of as sexy sex. With the proliferation of computers, webcams and smartphones during the latter part of the AIDS crisis this has also meant that gay men can make their own pornography more easily. Bareback porn is now something that we can all direct, produce, star in and share. However, for many men, both HIV positive and negative, the main reason for a reduction in the use of condoms has been a frustration with the physical and psychological barriers they create during sex, as Michael Shernoff, in his book *Without Condoms*, observes:

Much as we try to eroticise safer sex, there is no way around the fact that condoms both decrease the sensation of anal intercourse and interrupt the spontaneity of the sexual act (Shernoff, 2013, p72).

Many men don't like the feeling of wearing a condom. Often they don't know how to wear a condom properly or buy the correct size. Efforts to incorporate condom use into foreplay have largely failed. Over time condoms have developed an image as unsexy. Condom fatigue has developed as the safer sex message has run out of steam. The perceived loss of intimacy associated with condom use has lead some to take bigger sexual risks in order to regain sensation:

There is something deeply erotic, profoundly connecting and, some feel, even sacred about one person giving his most private and special fluid, semen, to the other as a gift of love and as a symbolic joining of two souls (Shernoff, 2013, p76).

The thrill of the moment dominates the perception of risk and the willingness to engage in risk. Time is collapsed in the mind between the pleasure of seeking the orgasm and the potential lifetime of living with HIV that this momentary risk could cause. These time factors are difficult to comprehend and pleasure often takes a priority over common sense. Risk is calculated on a second-by-second basis during sex and factors affecting transmission are weighed up often superstitiously and inaccurately. This moment of risk-weighing that takes place in this space is a central to the relationship between architecture and cruising that ASC seeks to intervene within. Although gay men have seen friends and lovers contract the virus for many rather than make an extra effort to protect themselves they often assume that it is only a matter of time before they are also infected. I think that there is a perception that getting HIV is inevitable and risk-taking has become a daily part of life, which Michael Shernoff acknowledges:

HIV negative gay men face unique challenges that make it seem almost easier to seroconvert (Shernoff, 2013, p101).

Transmission risk is related to a wider context of homophobia, high rates of depression and recreational drug use experienced by gay men. This concatenation of circumstances is often referred to as a syndemic i.e. multiple pandemics simultaneously occurring (Brennan et al. 2012). Since the beginning of the AIDS crisis the constant association between sex and risk has taken a toll

on the sexual culture of gay men. Condoms have become an emblem of the AIDS crisis that some have chosen to completely reject.



Fig.40. Vallée, Jean-Marc (2013). *Dallas Buyer's Club*. Available from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/11/03/the-true-story-behind-dallas-buyers-club-meet-the-real-ron-woodruff.html> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

Some gay men have fetishised risk as an alternate response to the HIV problem. Choosing when and how to convert from negative to positive is seen as empowering by some men. The film "The Gift" (Hogarth, 2003) explores the phenomenon of bugchasing; in which HIV negative men seek infection by having unprotected sex with HIV positive men. In this scenario the HIV positive partner offering the virus is referred to as the giftgiver, hence the title of the film. The film has been heavily criticised by HIV activists, and others, who suggest that the bugchaser and giftgiver duality are a mythological construct of the AIDS crisis.⁶ Whilst I would agree that there are very few people who are interested in fetishising the virus in this way the evidence that some gay men are looking to meet people of the opposite HIV status for unprotected sex can be easily found

on a range of websites and Tumblrs devoted to deliberate sero-conversion e.g. www.pozconvert.com. Bareback sex has been viewed as a subversive act - a resistance to heteronormative structures - inherently queer in the way that it employs risk as an erotic factor. Much of the existing critique of barebacking has focused on the Freudian death drive. Leo Bersani, in *Intimacies*, argues that in barebacking “the rectum becomes the procreative womb. But the barebacker’s rectum is a grave” (Bersani, 1987, pp197-222). He suggests that in an era of AIDS, in which gay men are still pilloried, the transmission of HIV becomes an amplified, almost tangible form, of cultural transmission. Indeed the language of bareback is a procreative one – anal sex is colloquially referred to as breeding and ejaculating inside the anus as ‘seeding’ whilst the anus itself is transformed into a mancunt. This satirisation of straight sex is ironic given Bersani’s argument that barebacking is an attempt at a uniquely gay cultural form. I would suggest that the way the language of barebacking indexes straight sex is in itself macabre and unliberated. I do not believe, however, that in the average unprotected sexual encounter between gay men there is anything nearly as political as that going on; it is more likely that bareback sex occurs with a long-term monogamous partner or out of laziness, accident or inebriation with a stranger.



Fig.41. Science Museum London (1992-93). AZT. Available from <http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/objects/display?id=93386&image=3> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

The increase in bareback sex may be in direct correlation to the improvement in HIV treatment that has occurred over the past twenty years. For some gay men the fear of getting HIV has been diminished as treatment has become available. HIV is no longer a death sentence. It is now possible, if you are diagnosed with HIV, to live to healthy life with a normal life expectancy if you are on A.R.T. There was no treatment for HIV at the very outset of the AIDS crisis and when any treatment became available (even experimental drugs that were later discredited) they were prohibitively expensive. The recent film *Dallas Buyer's Club* (fig.40) portrays the biography of Ron Woodroof, an HIV positive man who was dealing HIV medicines illegally in the USA before any trusted treatment for HIV was available. People were desperate and would try anything, and spend anything they needed, to try and stay alive. The story narrates the desperation felt amongst HIV positive people at the time.⁷ It was not until the 1990s that Highly Active Antiretroviral therapy (HAART) became available. It was proven over time that using a single drug, or two drugs did not sufficiently regulate the development of the virus. Thus treatment for HIV is a combination therapy, usually consisting of three separate drugs, which act on different points in the HIV lifecycle to reduce it replicating over a 24 hour period; a combination of fusion inhibitors, reverse transcriptase inhibitors, integrase inhibitors and protease inhibitors. A course of drugs is prescribed to a patient according to his particular needs – there are some possible side effects to each different drug but it is considered at this point in time that there is enough choice of different medicines and triple-acting combinations that a patient should be able to take the drugs on a daily basis without any side effects if they work closely with their doctor to monitor their condition. This involves regular blood tests to assess CD4 counts and viral loads as well as to assess the impact that the long-term medicinal regime may be having on general health, especially liver and kidney function. Early HIV drugs such as Azidothymidine (commonly known as AZT) (fig.41) formed part of a treatment regime which could consist of taking up to 40 pills per day for a patient. This pill burden meant adhering to a strict routine not only of taking one's medicine but also of observing rules about eating/drinking

or not eating/drinking either side of administering the drugs. Artist collective General Idea explored this problem in their 1990 installation (fig.42) *One Year of AZT and One Day of AZT*. The pill burden was huge; one's life was organised around medicine. Being on A.R.Ts was very public in the sense that you couldn't easily hide your medicine regime. Today, however, one-a-day pills such as ATRIPLA not only reduce the pill burden associated with living with HIV but have transformed what it means to be HIV positive. HIV has become a very private affair.

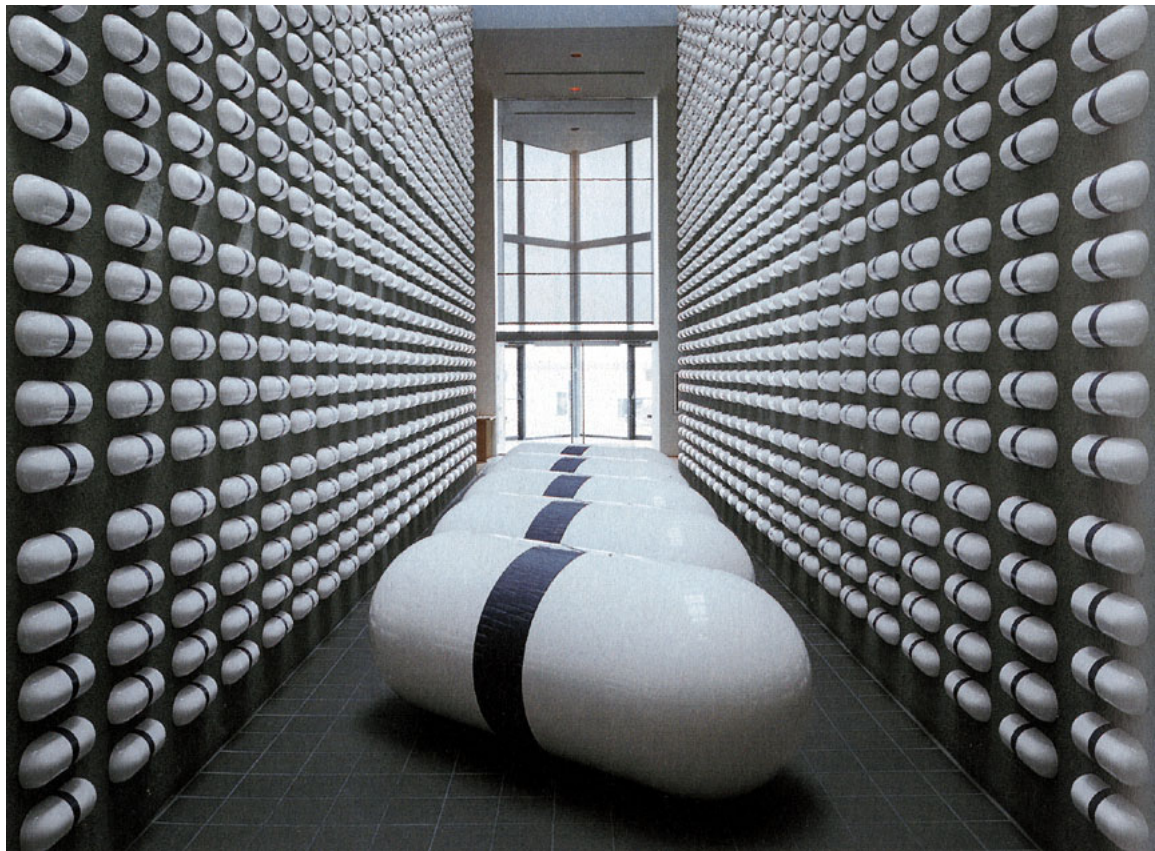


Fig.42. General Idea (1991). *One Year of AZT and One Day of AZT*. Available from <https://www.gallery.ca/en/see/collections/artwork.php?mkey=44029> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

Currently in the UK it is recommended that patients commence treatment for HIV before their CD4 count drops below 350. Increasingly a policy of early adoption of treatment exists. This can mean starting treatment soon after diagnosis. This policy is known as treatment as prevention and is an alternative to

condom use. It costs the NHS £500,000 per patient over their lifetime to be treated using A.R.T, including clinical care (Carter, 2015). It helps prevent the spread of the virus by keeping levels of the virus extremely low in HIV positive people. HIV positive patients on treatment and following a strict medicine regime can be expected to have an undetectable or negligible viral load (see definitions), which means their viral load is so low that it cannot be detected in an HIV test but depends on people being tested regularly and taking responsibility for themselves and others in knowing their status and acting accordingly. This does not mean that they have been cured of the virus but there are less than 50 copies of the virus per ml in their bloodstream. Being on A.R.T also means that one's CD4 count returns to normal or above average levels. Recent study PARTNER has explored the risk of passing the virus between couples that are sero-dissonant (see definitions) in which the HIV positive partner is on A.R.T with an undetectable viral load and they practice anal sex without a condom and are monogamous. Over a two-year period of study of 100 couples the virus was never passed on. This evidence is helping transform the approach to administering A.R.Ts and thinking about public health policy. It is considered that being HIV positive and on treatment with an undetectable viral load is the best possible prevention against HIV transmission. Furthermore, A.R.Ts can be prescribed to a person exposed to HIV within a short time window of around 72hrs in order to flush the virus out of their system before it has had time to incubate. So-called Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is like the morning after pill for HIV, except it is a month-long course of pills to take. It is not a guaranteed solution to exposure to HIV and depends on a patient knowing the HIV status of their partners and reporting rapidly to a sexual health clinic for treatment.

It is becoming more complicated for gay men to make educated choices about HIV risk today. Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is rapidly replacing the old message about condom use being the best prevention against HIV transmission. PrEP means taking an A.R.T. pill everyday as a preventative measure against contracting HIV. It means that you can have sex without a condom and still be

protected against the virus since if you come into contact with HIV there is already A.R.T. in the blood stream that will stop the virus from taking hold. Truvada, a brand name for the best-known PrEP in the USA, is already changing the landscape of sexual transmission risk in the USA. Truvada (fig.43) is a PrEP pill developed by Gilead that has gained notoriety in the USA since it's introduction in 2012 (Duran, 2016). The pill has been controversial for the way in which it may be perceived to encourage promiscuous behaviour, with those taking the pill being labelled by some gay men as "Truvada Whores". We need to remember that it is the level of risk one takes, not the quantity of sex one has that should be addressed in an attempt to reduce the spread of HIV. The treatment is not yet available in the UK and the NHS in England decided recently not to commission treatment (BBC News, 2016). This is despite the PROUD Study in the UK publishing data showing the effectiveness of PrEP in reducing transmissions among gay men (PROUD Study, 2016). However, the presence of PrEP, even in trial amounts, is transforming the conversation that gay men are having about HIV and risk in the UK. A friend of mine who tests for Terrence Higgins Trust (THT) in Chariot's Sauna in Liverpool Street reported to me that many clients have asked about PrEP and gained access to use it from friends on the PROUD study (who shouldn't be sharing medication). He reported a question that one person asked about "can I take two pills in the two days before a sex party and one pill the day after and still be OK?" There is a lot of ignorance and superstition surrounding the drugs that certain websites and agencies such as www.iwantprepnw.co.uk (iwantprepnw, 2016) are attempting to address. Add to this that HIV self-testing is now becoming available and over the next two years we are due to see a transformation in the culture of sexual health in the UK. Self-testing means that you are able to buy an HIV testing kit over-the-counter or online and administer the test yourself, without the presence of a medical representative. This evolution depends on users understanding the window of the test in order to know how to proceed when they get a result. The fear is that a self-test user getting a negative result for HIV will neglect to take into account the 4 weeks not covered by the test and actually be positive (and not have developed antibodies yet) and then go on to spread the virus to others.



Fig.43. Beall, Jeffrey (2012). *Truvada, a well-known brand of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) available in the USA today*. Available from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenofovir/emtricitabine#/media/File:Truvada.JPG> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

The biggest problem facing HIV today is ChemSex - having sex whilst using recreational drugs. Smartphone apps such as Grindr have led to a cultural shift in the way people meet for sex, moving from bars and clubs into people's homes. Private sex parties, often advertised as "Party and Play," or PNP, sessions often fill a weekend and usually involve taking drugs - especially crystal methamphetamine (known commonly as Crystal Meth or Tina), GHB (gamma-Hydroxybutyric acid) GBL (gamma-Butyrolactone) and mephedrone. These so-called *party drugs* give sex an increased intensity for the user. Many report that sex on crystal meth is so much better than sex without drugs that they only want to have sex when high. Robert Fuller, in his book *Spirituality in the Flesh*, describes the effect that drugs have on the brain:

Drugs as diverse as caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, and cocaine – though having very different neurochemical effects – all produce a sharp

increase in levels of dopamine (and therefore, testosterone) (Fuller, 2008, p101)

The chemicals released into the brain during sex are already mood transforming but combined with the effects of party drugs ChemSex has the potential to become a kind of transcendental experience. The pursuit of orgasm also releases dopamine “a natural stimulant...administering a reward for behaviours that release it into the nervous system” (Fuller, 2008, p102) and this natural stimulant combined with the synthetic rush of the drugs increases testosterone levels and sexual arousal. However, one of the downfalls of the way dopamine works on the brain is that it requires ever greater thrill-seeking to release the same amount into the brain:

once a receptor site on a membrane is occupied, future occupation of that site is often made more effective (or in some cases ineffective) because of changes in the sensitivity of the membrane (which allows for the learning and tolerance of drugs to occur) (Previc, 2009, p21).

Drug resistance is one of the dangers associated with dopamine as ever more drugs and risks are needed in order to achieve the same high. Thus ChemSex parties are sites of hypersexuality in which the participants use drugs and sex in combination to build to ever greater highs stimulated by the release of dopamine. In the presence of HIV these ChemSex sessions become especially dangerous and have contributed, in large part, to the increased transmission of HIV over the past five or so years. The danger of having sex on crystal is that it encourages a loss of inhibitions that encourages risk-taking behaviour. Condom use at these parties is lax and they may even be advertised as specifically for bareback sex. HIV positive people on A.R.T's may slip off their medicine regime for a few days, allowing their viral load to increase, and thus add to the risk of transmitting the virus to others. Crystal meth use also leads to loss of erection, so-called Crystal Dick, which makes attendees at a sex party more likely to adopt the passive role during anal sex. Viagra is often taken to increase erectile function and other drugs such as cocaine, marijuana, ketamine and alcohol might be consumed as uppers and downers to chemically control mood. Sex on crystal meth can go on for days without sleep. Other STDs, including Hepatitis C are

more likely to be passed on during these sessions. David Stuart, an expert in ChemSex at Dean Street Clinic in Soho, has advocated for a joined-up approach to dealing with HIV and drugs (Stuart, 2014). The HIV problem is now a conglomeration of problems that interrelate.

The complexity of the problems contributing to the continuing spread of HIV – homophobia, ChemSex, MSM, PNP, antiretroviral therapy, testing, barebacking, Grindr, etc. – cannot be seen in isolation from each other; HIV is now a mesh of interrelating problems that need addressing simultaneously. Perhaps PrEP is the best way for reducing the spread of the virus but I would like to think that there were other ways of intervening in the problem, perhaps spatially or linguistically as well. Just as antiretroviral therapy acts on the three key aspects of the lifecycle of the virus so too a targeted cultural approach to reducing HIV needs to address several social factors simultaneously.

¹ This is based on my conversations with David Stuart from Dean Street Clinic. We must also bear in mind the percentage of the population that remains untested. There are currently estimated to be 7300 gay men in the UK undiagnosed with HIV.

² For Example Daily Telegraph (1983) “Gay Plague” May Lead to Blood Ban on Homosexuals,” May 2, and Daily Mirror (1983) ‘Alert over “Gay Plague”’, May 2. It was known as the “gay plague” for some time, the name ascribed by various tabloid newspapers because the first victims of the virus were predominantly gay men. It later emerged that the virus disproportionately affected this group because they were at high risk of transmission from unprotected anal sex.

³ Other populations, such as sub-Saharan Africans, were also disproportionately affected but I will concentrate on the paradigm of gay men here because it contains unique problems.

⁴ Insertive and receptive anal intercourse is a standard medical way of describing the positions taken during anal sex where as “top” and “bottom” are the more colloquial forms. Someone who takes both positions or swaps during sex is known as “versatile.”

⁵ Off-site testing attempts to engage men who may not be openly gay, may be bisexual or who may identify as heterosexual despite have sex with men. In these cases the term Men Who Have Sex With Men, or “MSM,” is used by medical practitioners. It is therefore an umbrella term that can also include gay men.

⁶ Conversation with Ben Collins from the HIV thinktank ReShape.

⁷ Although the movie includes several gay and transsexual characters the lead is still as straight man, suggesting that times may have not changed very much in the mainstream media depiction of the virus.

3 Cruising

This chapter frames Alien Sex Club (ASC) within a discussion of the behaviour, language, history, places and technology that are associated with sex between strangers, which inform how HIV risk can be understood and represented.

What is cruising? The Law in the UK prohibits sex in public between homosexuals or heterosexuals yet this has not stopped people from continuing to cruise for sex in public. The psychologist Dennis Shelby attempts a possible definition of cruising:

Cruising is a wide-ranging phenomenon – from looking at pornography, or passerby, or performers that stimulate a private sexual reverie, to longing for an admiring response from someone, to an intense desire for a sexual encounter (Shelby, 2002, p192).

It is difficult to define cruising in a simple way. The phrase cruising comes into common usage in America during the twentieth century but its origins go back much further. Paul Baker identifies the etymology of the phrase:

...cruise originated in the seventeenth century and was first used in connection with the movement of the ships corresponding to the Dutch word *Kruiser* (to cross) (Baker, 2002, p47).

Cruising is a crossing of paths between two people in space-time. It is a meeting that may only be fleeting but it is profound for both parties. The dictionary defines cruising as:

[**trans.**] informal **attempt to pick up (a sexual partner)** : *he was cruising a pair of sailors.*

Cruising is a pursuit of sex. It is not sex itself. It is the process, the lead-up to, the before of sex. In this section of writing I will attempt to understand cruising from a range of different angles – behavioural, linguistic, historical, social and technological. I will compare cruising in nature, in the urban environment and how it has changed in the advent of digital technologies. I draw on personal

accounts as well as incorporating literature reviews of certain key texts including Turner's *Backward Glances*, Baker's *Polari* and Mowlabocus' *Gaydar Culture*.

3.1 Gaydar

Cruising in daily life depends on what is colloquially known as a gaydar. This portmanteau of gay and radar is explored in detail in Cheryl Nicholas' article "Gaydar: Eye-gaze as identity recognition among gay men and lesbians." She argues that gay people depend on a gaydar in order to identify each other:

Gay Identity lacks defining phenotypical characteristics. As such, gay and lesbian group affiliation is ascertained on the basis of participative behaviour around shared systems of meanings among group members. Along with verbal communication, non-verbal behaviour acts as one of the primary tools of identity recognition within the gay community. The folk concept used within the gay community to name the recognition of verbal and non-verbal behaviour associated with gay identity is "Gaydar" (Nicholas, 2004, p60).

A gaydar is a learned behaviour that uses a variety of socio-cultural tools to index a gay identity as well as to identify one. Signifiers of a gay identity might range from mannerisms and gestures through to clothing choices and conversational reference points. The gaydar is a crucial aspect of cruising. Let me use a personal cruising account to demonstrate the gaydar in action:

On the way to the studio I was on the Jubilee line going from Waterloo to London Bridge, it was about 6pm and I was tired. I was also very brightly dressed. People had been staring at me all day. I think I looked mad as opposed to 'hot'. There was a tall, trendy guy in my carriage and he caught my eye, mostly because of the cut of his hair - shaved high at the sides and then sort of a quiff on top - and then I saw him looking at me and I split-second wondered if he was gay. I wasn't really looking to cruise so I just looked away for a good few minutes between stops but the next time I looked over he raised his eyebrows and smiled, to initiate contact. I didn't do a full smile back; I was more coquettish than that, more off guard and awkward/nervous. He was the one leading it. I looked away again, knowing this was now a 'thing' and that I could do something with it if I wanted. I had the power now. I was trembling with nerves, turned on, flattered, excited, worried, knowing that this was happening and I was courting it

and feeling the rush of being cruised. I left it a long time before looking back up and I was psyching myself up for getting off the train and wondering if he was alighting at the same station or not. I walked away feeling his gaze on me (personal account).

If a man is cruising another man it is a waste of time for him to cruise a straight man. How did we know each other are gay? Our gaydars facilitated our cruising each other. He must have sensed something in my manner. We were observing each other's clothing, haircuts, body language and especially eye contact. This is one of the main ways in which I knew that it was safe to flirt with this other man:

One of the main behaviour types that was reported present during Gaydar occurrence is direct and prolonged eye-contact between the person whose Gaydar was activated and the person who triggered the recognition. At least one of the people involved in the gaze interaction is aware that he or she is performing the function (Nicholas, 2004, p72).

One may lead or instigate the gaze and the other may follow. The gaze is eroticized. As Turner says "There's an art to cruising and it has a lot to do with timing and with the eyes" (Turner, 2003, p56). In my example of the train however, it is not this strong gaze that we are dealing with but a flickering of eye contact, back and forth, more staccato – broken by other passengers in the train and by the ambiguity of the situation:

The broken stare in which "one or both of the interactants "break" the gaze due to either trying to be polite, paying attention to someone else, or being embarrassed due to the possibility of behaving inappropriately (Nicholas, 2004, p75).

Cruising employs the gaydar as a process of cultural tuning in to gauge whether or not the attraction is reciprocated. As Nicholas articulates "gaze disengagement followed by re-engagement becomes a primary force of identity recognition" (Nicholas, 2004, p75). Certainly in my example of the train the confusion, multiple attempts and eye contact and final confirmation that the meaning of the gaze is shared has created a cruising journey that has deepened the eroticism of the interaction. Were it simply to have been a long strong stare I wonder if there

would have been less erotic charge? Furthermore, did anyone else in the train carriage notice? I expect not. The Gaydar is a covert mechanism:

The gay community relies on the tacit knowledge that recognition through Gaydar is possible (Nicholas, 2004, p65).

This invisible aspect of cruising is, as Nicholas puts it, a survival strategy and “a way to function within the heterosexual standard” (Nicholas, 2004, p64). The loaded erotic charge of the train interaction can remain hidden from all the other passengers (without a gaydar). The gay man or woman can emphasise or disguise their sexuality based on the cultural clues that they give and the receiver can identify them more or less successfully based on his or her cultural proficiency level. As Aaron Betsky has also observed of cruising:

This invisible network spreads itself throughout the city, evidencing itself only in gestures and certain isolated, emblematic items such as scarves or the colours of one’s clothes (Betsky, 1997, p143).

In my account of the train journey despite my awkward feelings about my sartorial choices that day they clearly defined me as culturally gay and helped advertise me to the stranger on the train, who picked up on my cues using his gaydar, as someone available to flirt with, to cruise. Nicholas defines the gaydar as a form of cultural competency dependent on four key conditions:

1. The appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviour is displayed by the sender.
2. The acknowledgement of the meaning behind the sender’s behaviour by other members of the group.
3. The awareness that verbal and non-verbal behaviour is used as an organised ritual to establish identity.
4. The recognition of such behaviour, by the receiver, as actions particular to the identity of the group (Nicholas, 2004, p67)

Because of the historical context in which homosexuals have often had to hide from persecution cruising using gaydar processes has developed as a codified set of behaviours in which members of the group can be identified to each other whilst remaining hidden within the larger group.

3.2 Slang

Cruising involves many codes both verbal and non-verbal of which slang is an important part. Acknowledging other cruisers and discerning if their sexual interests are compatible with your own can be abbreviated using slang. Historically, certain cruising behaviours have been formalised into discernable codes. In his book *Polari: the lost language of gay men* Paul Baker (2002) explores the mid-twentieth century subcultural phenomenon known as Polari, a kind of “gay shorthand” that many gay men, especially in the UK, would use at the time to help indicate their sexual preference to each other. An abbreviated dictionary of Polari words might include the following:

Cottage = toilet for sex
Fantabulosa = wonderful
Khazi = Toilet
Gelt = Money
Mince = Walk
Mangarie = eat
Omi = man
Omi-palone = gay man
Palone = woman
Palone-omi = lesbian
Ogles = eyes
Screech = speak
On yer todd = alone
Hooper = dancer

It conforms the subject-verb-object structure of English but introduces some non-standard grammatical forms:

- Frenchifying words – “bevoir” (drink)
- Blends – “fantabulosa” (fantastic – hyperbole)
- Compounds – “oglefakes” (glasses)
- Suffixation – “drinkettes” (drinks)

Polari is playful and sounds absurd; it was a form of speech that drew on Sailor's slang, Romany, Yiddish, thief's cants, backslang and Italian. Kenneth Williams and Hugh Paddick cemented it in the cultural imagination in the 1960's radio show *Round the Horne*, which demonstrated the appeal of Polari to straight audiences as a form of gobbledygook innuendo. At a time when homosexuality was still illegal Baker argues that Polari, one aspect of a 1950's gaydar, was a survival mechanism for gay men:

If gay subculture can be seen as a 'community of practice', then Polari was one of the developing linguistic repertoires as different members interacted with each other (Baker, 2002, p10).

Just as in a pattern of glances, gestures and cultural choices detailed as aspects of the gaydar, through a shared use of certain words gay men could identify each other. The word "naff," meaning inferior or tacky, has partly come from the Polari acronym "Not Available For Fucking" i.e. gay men could talk together about whether or not other men were gay without betraying their own identity. Polari was an anti-language designed to keep straights out as much as to keep gays in:

...anti-languages are therefore concerned with the definition and maintenance of alternative (and often secret) identities, organized through ritual participation in alternative social hierarchies (Baker, 2002, p10).

Polari turns English on its head, parodying the dominant heterosexual culture and asserting a gay one in its place. Certain key words like "riah" (which means hair) are literal inversions of the English spelling that become a kind of linguistic parody. Polari is flamboyant, drawing on the tradition of the West End theatre. The compound "riah zshoosher" (meaning hairdresser) employs what linguists call the Post-Alveolar Fricative "zs", simultaneously celebrating and denigrating the profession. The bathos of Polari is of particular note. Polari frequently employs "negative politeness" (Baker, 2002, p77) as a device for mocking and hyperbolizing its subjects for comedic and critical effect:

Oh varda the fantabulosa butch palone omi

Oh look at the fantastic fat lesbian

The stereotype of the gay man as a bitch has partly grown out of the use of Polari. Baker argues that Polari was “a coping mechanism in the face of potential tragedy” (Baker, 2002, p77) and a social lubricant and a linguistic was of conjoining gay men:

Polari was used as a way of tearing down heterosexual reality, and remoulding it as a world seen through gay eyes, with gay standards (Baker, 2002, p85)

It pivots on a tragicomic axis that is inherently camp. The user of Polari is deft at double-voicing and adopting an alternative identity through speech:

The gay man who uses a Polari voice in order to point out an attractive man is using a form of double voicing or metaphorical code-switching (Baker, 2002, p85).

The gay man is learned at speaking in quotations, referencing texts from poetry, films, songs books and theatrical productions in order to disguise and reveal his self as a range of different cultural types depending on the situation. Cruising depends on the chameleon-like ability to switch back and forth between visible and concealed, gay and straight, private and public and Polari is a useful tool in aiding this transformation. It offers speedy cover, allowing its user to play a part and assert an identity purely through speech as opposed to dress code. In fact Polari is a linguistic code that gay men can share with each other without outing themselves within heterosexual company. e.g.:

Oh ogle the lallies on the omi palone.
Oh look at the legs on the gay man.

Baker argues, “language becomes a key factor in the construction of gay identities” (Baker, 2002, p10). At this time Gay men begin to index a gay identity for each other using specific patterns of speech that includes slang. Gay men have invented, innovated and employed Polari to facilitate a cruising culture that corresponds to Maturana’s argument in *Autopoiesis and Cognition* that “linguistic

behaviour is orienting behavior” (Maturana, c1980). Even today gay men reply on abbreviations to understand and locate each other in cultural space e.g.:

Twink = young / smooth gay man
Bear = large / hairy gay man
DL = down low = discrete
Sub = sexually receptive partner
Top = sexually insertive partner
Vers = sexually versatile
PNP = Party'n'Play = sex with drugs and/or alcohol
Poz = HIV positive
Neg = HIV negative
Fierce = amazing

Gay slang still draws on its Polari inheritance and TV shows such as “RuPaul’s Drag Race” (Logo TV, 2009) have helped bring this and the language of the New York Voguing scene back into popular usage. We will see later that slang is very important for cruising online where the written word counts for more and the taxonomy of body type becomes important.

3.3 Nature

Stranger by the Lake (L'Inconnu du lac) is a 2013 French film that exemplifies what cruising outdoors is like (fig.44). The protagonist Franck is caught between two men; one gay, whom he is sexually attracted to, and the other bisexual, whom he becomes close friends with. Both relationships are the result of cruising. He visits the lake almost daily over the summer of the film to sunbathe, swim and cruise the woods for sex. The film is essentially shot in three locations – (i) the car park by the lake (ii) the lake and lakeshore (iii) the woods by the lake. The woods are where most of the cruising and all of the sex goes on. Men meet here. It is known as a cruising ground. Aaron Betsky describes cruising as:

...an activity not unlike the aborigine “walkabout”, in which the world becomes a score or script that one must bring alive by walking it (Betsky, 1997, p144).

Cruising the woods is a ritual of incanting the space using markers left by nature as signposts. The long grass, bushes and trees of the cruising ground in 'Stranger by the Lake' offer a range of spaces within which to walk, meet, find shade, congregate, lie down, hide and have sex etc. The film explicitly shows how men meet each other anonymously for sex by cruising in parks and forests including the sexual and psychological risks that they take in this pursuit. For many of the men cruising the woods it is well-trodden ground. Certain people cruise by waiting in the bushes and masturbating, some by making eye contact and others by repeatedly walking the space until something or someone new occurs and their excitement is aroused. Moving around the cruising ground again and again, until finding a partner (or not) is a form of variation upon a theme. In fact this form of cruising highlights how much cruising is about the pursuit of sex more than the orgasm itself. Cruising is represented in *Strangers by the Lake* as a beautiful way to waste time. It is a way of socializing, meeting new friends and killing time as Mark Turner has stated:

...cruising...isn't only about the goal of sex...There are many levels of erotic investment and fantasy that exist in the idea of the possible, the potential, but the wholly unrealized encounter (Turner, 2003, p61).

The fantasy life of the cruiser, his internal life, is perhaps more important than the external results of his cruising. To be amongst men who are all looking for sex opens up the availability and range of experiences. Cruising is a process of relieving and performing boredom simultaneously.



Fig.44. *Stranger by the Lake* (2013). Directed by Alain Guiraudie [DVD]. France: Peccadillo Pictures.



Fig.45. *Book Worm History* (2016). *Rambles section of Central Park in New York, a well known cruising ground.* Available from <http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/the-ramble-cave> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

Most major cities have parks that are known to be places in which men cruise for sex. In New York the Rambles section of Central Park is a well-established cruising ground as is the Retiro Park in Madrid. The Rambles suits cruising for its craggy hiding spots, changes in ground level and vegetation of varying heights (fig.45), which allow for moments of concealment and revelation amongst cruisers – private and public liaisons. The Retiro Park is planted in a more formal way with topiary hedges and wide expanses of flat lawn (fig.46) in an Italianate tradition. This is less suited to cruising in my opinion but it still goes on. London's Russell Square was a park famed for cruising until it was replanted in 1998, as Mark Turner describes:

Russell Square, the queerest patch until they began locking it up at night several years ago, also attracted a diverse, though mostly youngish, set - students and lecturers from nearby colleges; merry office workers out on the town; gay guys from the bars and clubs in Soho; and, of course, pickpockets and muggers (it isn't risk-free). It peaked between 10.30pm and half past midnight, from the time the pubs shut until the last Tube home (Turner, 2006).

In this description the park is a transition zone between spaces of leisure and work, city and suburb and is thus also a transition space between the identities created by and in such spaces. The interzone of the park is a transitional space of self. Like the mythological forest, of which it is an urbanized form, the park can play host to certain behaviours and people that the city cannot otherwise contain.¹ Thus, in 1998, when proposals were put forward to renovate Russell Square, in order to rid it of being a place of sex, some were not in support:

ROW OVER CRUISING IN LONDON'S RUSSELL SQUARE

7 August, 1998

Gay campaigners have submitted a proposal to Camden LBC to turn Russell Square in London into an Amsterdam-style cruising zone, the Evening Standard reports on its website.

The move follows a long-running dispute between local residents and homosexuals who use the square's park for sexual encounters.

Russell Square is to be revamped next year with a £1 million grant from the Lottery heritage fund. Resident have campaigned for a full-time warden to stop people having sex in the park. Also being considered by Camden council is a proposal to install gates which could be locked after dark.

Outrage! which put forward the cruising zone proposal, opposes the gates idea, saying Russell Square should be a zone of tolerance where cruising is allowed (Local Government Chronicle, 1998).

As a student at nearby UCL at the time I can recall being saddened that this historical cruising ground had been abolished so effectively and quickly overnight. It removed from the centre of London one of our few remaining outdoor spaces of sex. There is something erotic about having sex outdoors in a public park. The risk of getting caught might be part of the attraction, as Owen

Jones suggests in his article, published in *Timeout*, about cruising on London's Hampstead Heath:

So, is there anything sexy about looking over your shoulder the whole time for police, getting scratched to death by thorns, and having the life bugged out of you by a man you wouldn't look twice at in a bar? Frankly, there is (Jones, 2010, no page number).

Importantly cruising in nature re-orders society and heightens reality. Jones argues that this analogue form of cruising is somehow more charged than cruising for sex online (which I will come to later) partly because it is an initiation into a gay scene:

It was with trepidation and buzzing excitement that I'd clambered on to Hampstead Heath on this balmy spring evening. Sweaty-palmed, I'd navigated the muddy slope leading down to the West Heath from Jack Straw's Castle, all the time thinking: Why am I doing this? As soon as I reached the main path, it was clear that something queer was going on. And now, with solitary men sizing each other up, and sizing me up, there's no going back: I'm cruising, for the first time in my life. I quickly figure out the ground rules: talking is the ultimate no-no. Instead, communication is made thorough looks, raised eyebrows, and the subtlest of gestures. A stoke of the eyebrow means you're interested, a jerk of the head indicates 'follow me', a couple of pats on the forearm 'no, thank you' (Jones, 2010, no page number).

His introduction to cruising on Hampstead heath is an evocative and memorable one. He is forced to navigate the landscape, in the dark, contend with the weather and the conditions underfoot. Then, once through this first round of practical challenges he is then confronted with social ones; how do the interactions between the cruisers work? He goes on:

The cruising ground has an unspoken sense of camaraderie, though. As I squelch through the dirt I hear a voice: 'Get out the mud!' I turn to see a guy in his thirties laughing, smiling at me – he's a seasoned cruiser, I'm a newbie, and we're both in on the joke. 'Thanks', I mutter, gratefully returning the smile and moving on to the dry path. We all know what we're doing is taboo, and we're all in this together. Cruisers are willing to help a brother out, and, surprisingly, it feels safe (Jones, 2010, no page number).

As with Franck's story in *Stranger by the Lake* Jones narrates his experience of cruising as one of fraternity as well as orgasm. In fact he goes on to suggest that this way of cruising in nature is liberating from the normal pressures of the gay scene:

Cruising liberates you from the idea of what a hook-up should look like. I would be lying if I said that the Heath is a place where appearance and age are irrelevant, but it is true that in the gloom these things matter a lot less. The fleeting encounters you have when cruising lead to an understanding of the have nots in gay culture – the flabby, the closeted, the small-dicked (Jones, 2010, no page number).

Meeting strangers in the dark in the park or the forest cannot be the slick performance of self, afforded by the bar or disco. Choice of sexual partner is limited, or sometimes opened up, and the decision of who to touch or have sex with is based not on haircut, dress-sense or if the other person is boyfriend material but on the intuitive consideration of the sexual chemistry of the cruisers and the charge of the moment. I do not wish to suggest that this is some Pastoral idyll, however, cruising in nature draws on this tradition – a harmonious moment of man and nature – or at least this is the rhetoric of the fantasy that is being performed by those involved. Despite changes in how people cruise over the past twenty years, because of technology how gay men are received in society, there is still a need to cruise in this way. The Daily Mail reported in 2006 on the Pop Star George Michael being caught cruising on Hampstead Heath:

George Michael has insisted he feels no shame about his seedy encounter with a stranger in a London park. The 43-year-old star spoke out after being caught emerging from the bushes with pot-bellied jobless van driver Norman Kirtland last week on London's notorious homosexual haunt Hampstead Heath. In a frank telephone interview on Channel 4's Richard and Judy show, the former Wham! star said he believed there was nothing wrong with having sex with strangers in public places, which is known as cruising. He said: 'I've got no issue with cruising, it is something I have talked about many times. 'You can't be in shame about the situation if the person isn't shamed, and I am certainly not that. 'I should be able to be what I am to young, gay people, which is a man who has succeeded in the industry for 25 years. 'Sorry if people don't like the fact I cruise on Hampstead Heath but the police absolutely accept that it goes on at night,

it's the only place in London where that is so it's generally a safe place' (Hind, 2006, no page number).

Michael, who is in a long-term relationship with Kenny Goss, has been caught cottaging previously in a toilet in Los Angeles. I am interested in Michael's defiance about cruising as a positive personal activity, complimentary to, not contradicting, his relationship with Goss. I believe that Michael's account of his desire to cruise represents a broader experience amongst certain men (and women) who enjoy having sex with strangers in nature.



Fig.46. Yoong, Shing (2016). *Retiro Park in Madrid*. Available from <http://www.theculturemap.com/buen-retiro-park-madrid/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

3.4 City

Cruising may increasingly be considered as an urban phenomenon. Mark Turner, in his book *Backwards Glances*, suggests that cruising the city is a way to “hold alienation temporarily at a distance” (Turner, 2003, p58). I can remember as a younger man, and a cruiser, in London being intimidated by the scale of the city and the overwhelming feeling that I would never be able to know all its places let alone its people. Cruising in London was a balance between the risk of danger and getting caught set against the quick thrill and the safety of nobody knowing who I was. It was exhilarating and the emotionally heightened state of my encounters in a particular place helped forge memories that enabled me to build a city in my mind – a mental map of the city made by cruising it. Over time this mental cruising map has helped me feel at home in the big city. For Turner, cruising is a way of embracing estrangement as opposed to being consumed by it. He argues that cruising develops in:

...an urban world defined increasingly by density of population – of people who remain essentially anonymous and who encounter others mostly as strangers – required new ways of understanding the fleeting moments of modernity (Turner, 2003, p57).

In this reading the cruiser is an urban protagonist who performs (and owns) his own anonymity through embracing that of the stranger. Strangers are eroticized and fantasized about by the cruiser. Who might I meet this time? Cruising the city streets builds on cruising in nature by opening up the potential of the entire city to generate the “chance encounter” (Turner, 2003, p145). Cruising is a way of walking the city and riffing on its architecture (to borrow a term from musical improvisation) and feeling part of the metropolis:

The cruising ground becomes a way of carefully tracing the contours of the city in all of its rational, functional reality, and inscribing one’s self in that anonymous world (Betsky, 1997, p145).

Cruising is a geographical learning tool, a procedure to explore the city as a place and series of spaces, the incentive of which is sex. When I lived in Rome I walked the entire city on foot, without a map, cutting through back streets and enjoying the process of getting lost and then finding where I was again. This process of loss and rediscovery of self, of location, of the familiar is intrinsic to cruising. Cruising the city is a way of moving through architectural space that performs an effect on the interior space of the body.

...to engage with the contradictions of the external world of the city streets is...to engage with the internal world of the self (Turner, 2003, p93).

In cruising there is a psychological equation that is being made between the muscle memory of the legs that are walking, the brain that is processing the street plan and architectural facades and the erotic excitement of the gaze and bodies of strangers. Architecture itself is an externalisation of the human body and cruising is a process of reinterpreting this exterior space by allowing it to re-enter the body. Cruising the city is a process of learning that is facilitated by the fetishising of anonymity:

The cruiser's intention is to find in the passing glances in the street that person whose gaze returns and validates his own (Turner, 2003, p59).

One is lost in the city, hidden, unknown and through a glance of recognition (a glance of lust) one feels engaged, befriended and involved. Cruising thus alleviates the isolation of the city whilst "maintaining an anonymous distance" (Turner, 2003, p30). This binary push-pull in cruising of flirt-withdraw is an urban practice of survival. Cruising presupposes anonymity. Shelby argues that the practice of meeting strangers for sex is, on a psychological level, a process of self-discovery:

Let us explore the phenomenon of cruising with the idea that the self can become destabilized, the person on some deeper level feels lost, and manifestly feels an acute need to connect with another person (Shelby, 2002, p192).

Cruising is a displacement of self, an estrangement from self in the pursuit of the other. It hinges on the expectation that in playing with one's boundary of self for a moment in time that it will be lost only momentarily; in this dangerous casting off of self there is an unspoken contract with the other that there will be an exhilarating reward in return. This reward might be orgasm but it might also just be friendship. In a worse case scenario it can be a momentary ego death from which one's sense of self needs rebuilding afterward (I will develop this later). This means that the cruiser requires a strong sense of self, capable of risking:

Cruising reveals an essential loneliness. This, however, is a loneliness aware of its own space, rather than a mere separation. It is the continually reenacted search for connection, the revelation of anonymity in the most intimate knowledge of the space of the body, the darkness of the unused city, and the liveliness of disconnected orgasms... (Betsky, 1997, p149).

Here Aaron Betsky is arguing that cruising may be an acting-out of the existential crisis. Beyond anonymity, cruising reminds its practitioners of the limitations of their own bodies and their own ability to communicate. This is a liberating realisation as Turner observes in the writing of Walt Whitman:

What is significant in Whitman's cruising vision is that through a kind of learned behaviour of the streets, the modern city is not nearly as alienating as we often presume (Turner, 2003, p120).

Intimacy with a stranger is a profound act of trust and an acknowledgement of a shared human experience, that of loneliness, which can open the individual up to new relationships, new experiences of the city and new senses of self.

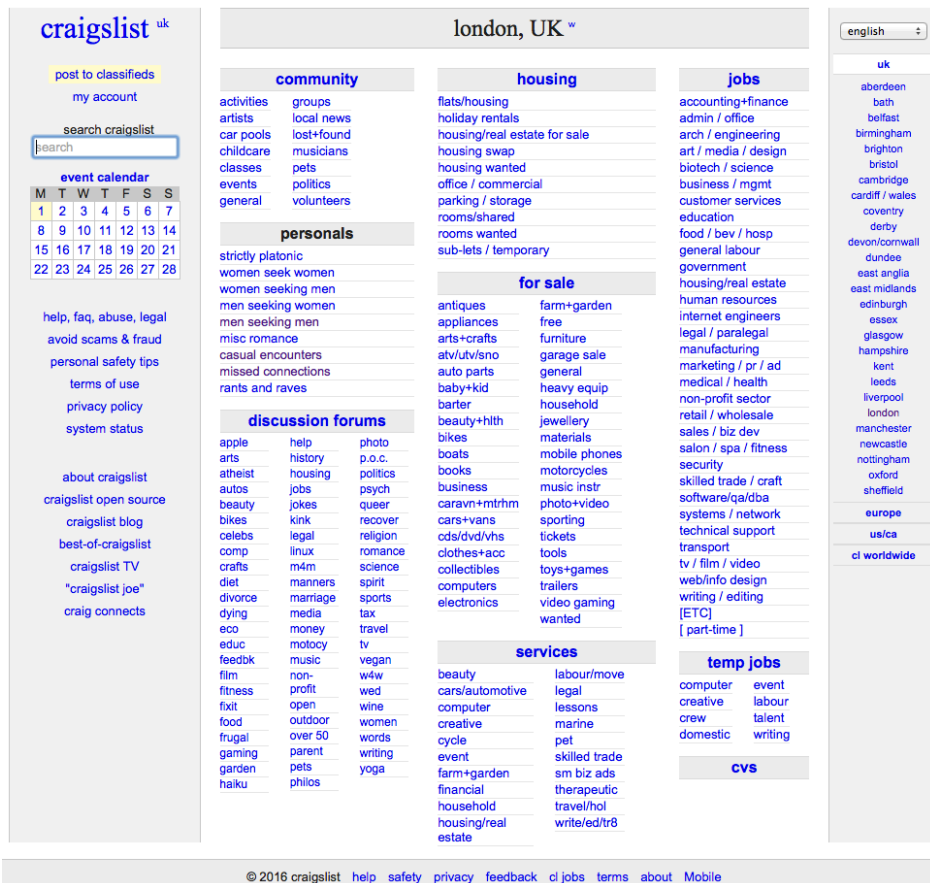


Fig.47. Craigslist (2016). Homepage. *Craigslist*. Available from <http://london.craigslist.co.uk> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

[craigslist](#) > men seeking men > warning & disclaimer

By clicking the link below you confirm that you are 18 or older and understand personals may include adult content.

[men seeking men](#)

[Safer sex](#) greatly reduces the risk of STDs (e.g. HIV). Please [report](#) suspected exploitation of minors.

Fig.48. Craigslist (2016). The warning before entering the men seeking men page. *Craigslist*. Available from <http://london.craigslist.co.uk/i/personals?category=m4m> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

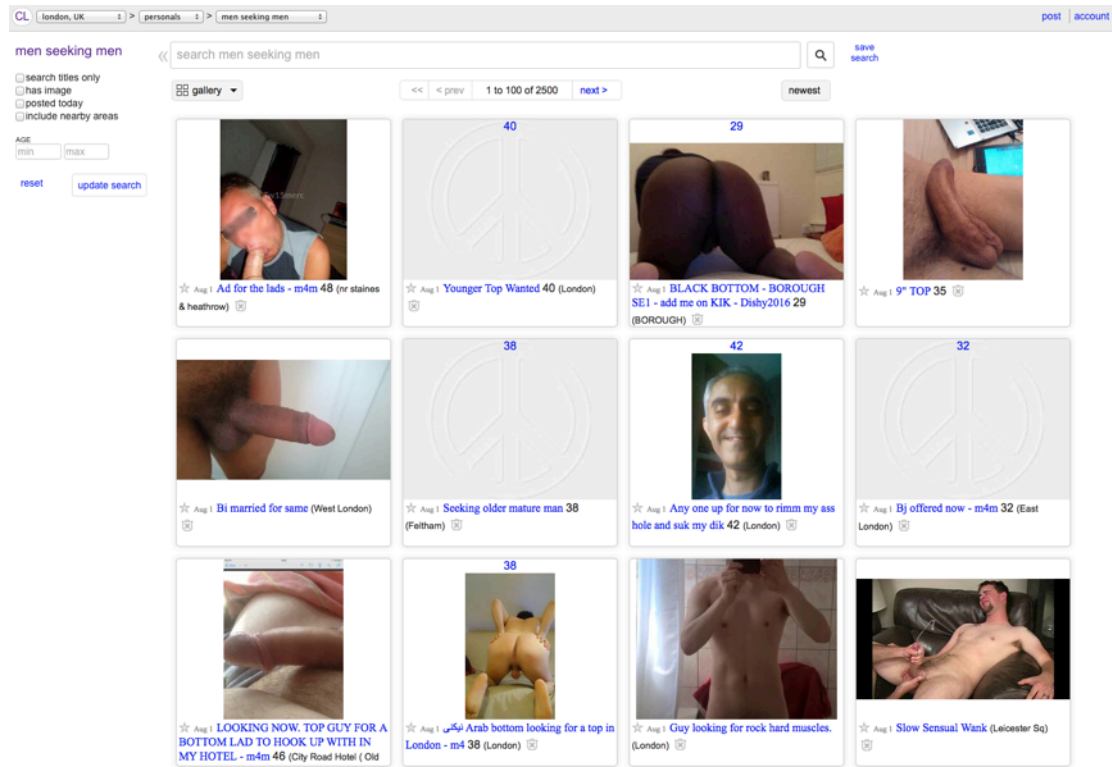


Fig.49. Craigslist (2016). The 'men seeking men' page. *Craigslist*. Available from <http://london.craigslist.co.uk/search/m4m> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

3.5 Digital

Over the past fifteen years cruising online has emerged as the predominant way in which men look for sex together. Digital cruising is very different to its analogue counterpart in that all the cruising is all done in the virtual space of the computer; and the sex may take place in one's own home (or office). The simplest way to find sex online is to use craigslist.com (fig.47.). Craigslist is an international free classified advertisement website that lists jobs, for sale items, services and rooms for rent as well as personals ads. It is now atypical for people to look for romantic meetings here instead looking for sex. When one enters the personals section there is an age restriction warning and a disclaimer about sexually transmitted diseases (fig.48). Inside the 'men seeking men' section a list of thumbnails appears showing body parts and giving headline-grabbing slogans, such as "ANY SWEATY COCK WANT SUCKING?" (fig.49). Not everyone posts a picture but it helps attract attention if you do. Certain things are prohibited such

as posting a phone number and whilst the website is administered for such deviations, users can find ways around the rules if they try hard enough. Clicking on a thumbnail opens a page in which a larger version of the photo appears, perhaps along with additional images, as well as written details of what the advertiser is seeking or offering. This is an example of a recent posting:

I am looking for Desent Clean TOP guy for regular sex/fun ..I like Turkish, Greek, Persian, Arab guys and.... more as long u r TOP! I am friendly, mediterranean BTM guy with simple tastes and desires, easy going ,gsoh, discreet and clean! I CANT accommodate, i can come to your place if you are based around sw/se London or meet public. I ONLY meet guys that ALWAYS practice SAFE sex, have shower b4 meet, and DONT use drugs. If friendship developed , that will be a bonnus Your pictures and LOCATION will increase my reply chances from None to....100%!!!²

This advert is attempting to sort on the basis of nationality, sexual position, location, cleanliness, safety and sobriety. It is humorous that after laying down all these conditions the advertiser is open to friendship as well. Some advertisements are incredibly detailed and specific about what is wanted or not wanted whilst others are very vague. You are able to respond to adverts directly by email. The email identity of the person advertising is scrambled by the website and their identity may only become known via private email if they choose to instigate correspondence. Such virtual anonymity is comparable to the analogue anonymity of cruising Hampstead heath – the user chooses how much they wish to be or not be identified. I have met people on craigslist over the years both in London and in New York (where it is more popular) and unlike analogue cruising the online version often involves spelling things out in written form in a way that can be very blunt. The slang associated with cruising online is a development of the analogue gay slang I described earlier. Some online slang terms may include:

Top = sexually insertive partner, anally
Bttm = Bottom = sexually receptive partner, anally
Vers = versatile = either insertive or receptive

accom = I accommodate you at my flat/hotel/office etc.
travel = I travel to your flat/hotel/office etc.
PNP = party'n'play = sex with drugs and/or alcohol
FF = fist fucking
Watersports = piss
Scat = shit
Leather
Twink = young gay man, smooth, slim
Bear = bigger / fat and hairy gay man
DL = down low = the need for discretion
Gsoh = good sense of humour

People may post descriptions in which they are looking for a “generou\$\$” host, the use of the dollar sign implying either that they are a prostitute or they are broke and looking for sex for money. The ability to cruise in real space using a glance is replaced online by the need to write a description and post photographs advertising oneself.

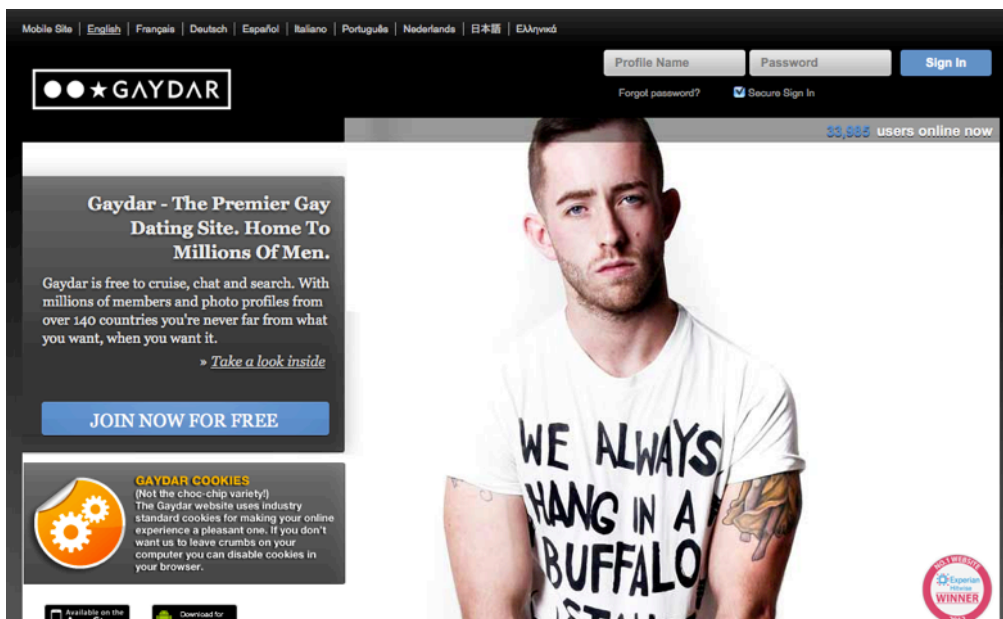


Fig.50. Gaydar (2014). Screenshot from the homepage of cruising website. *Gaydar*. Available from <http://www.gaydar.net> [Accessed 1 August 2014].

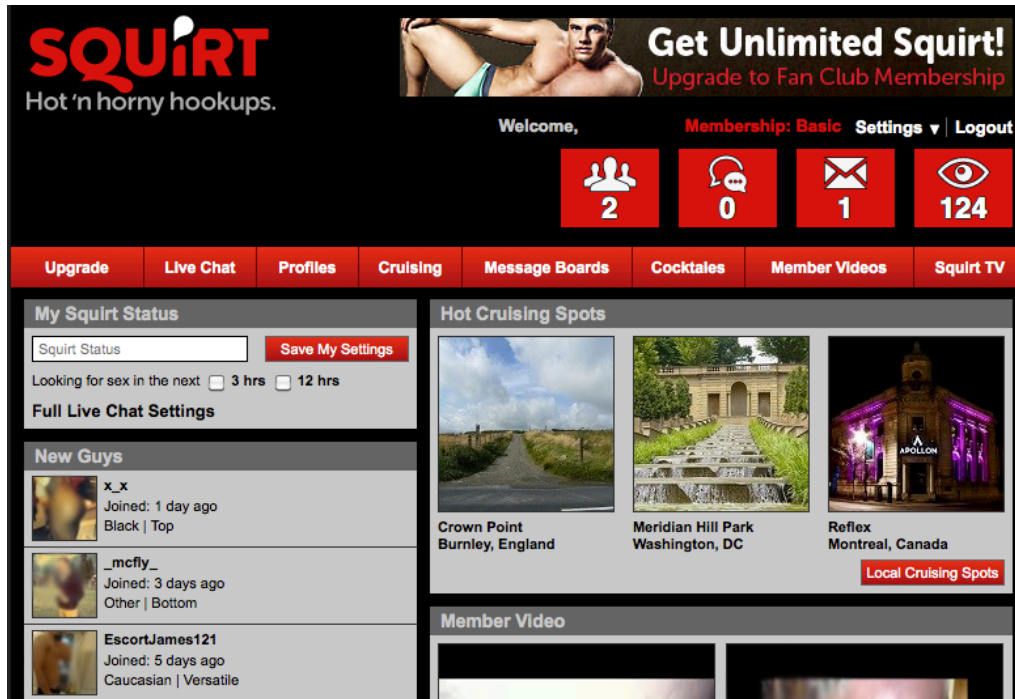


Fig.51. Squirt (2014). Inside the cruising website Squirt, displaying a range of menus allowing users to search a range of categories for sex. *Squirt*. Available from <http://www.squirt.org> [Accessed 1 August 2014].

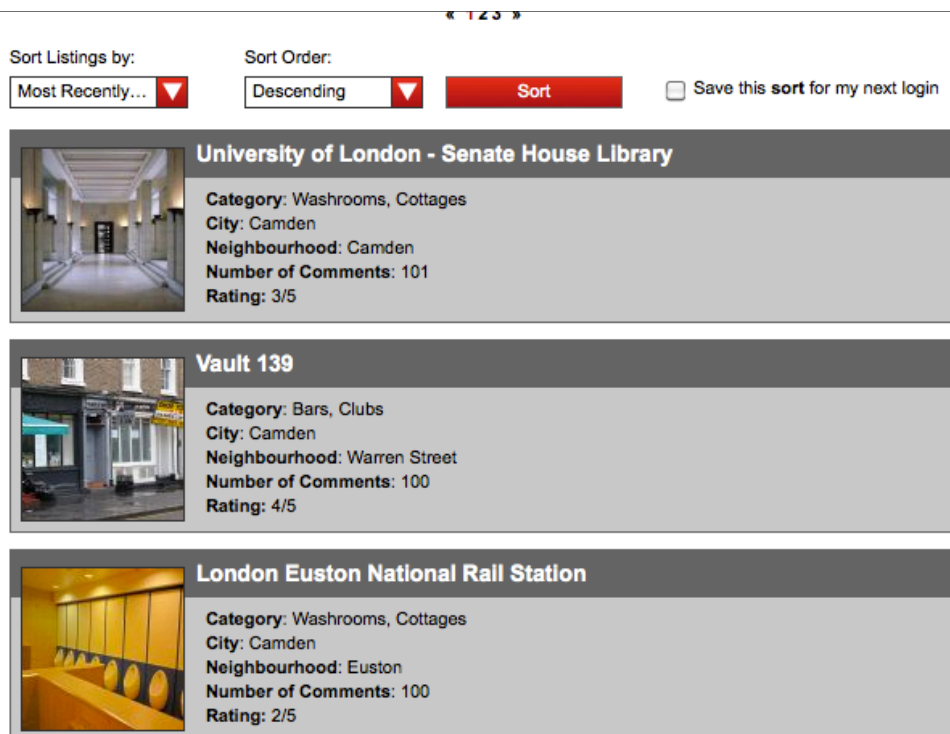


Fig.52. Squirt (2014). A screengrab from a geographical search within Squirt that shows popular cruising locations within central London. *Squirt*. Available from <http://www.squirt.org> [Accessed 1 August 2014].

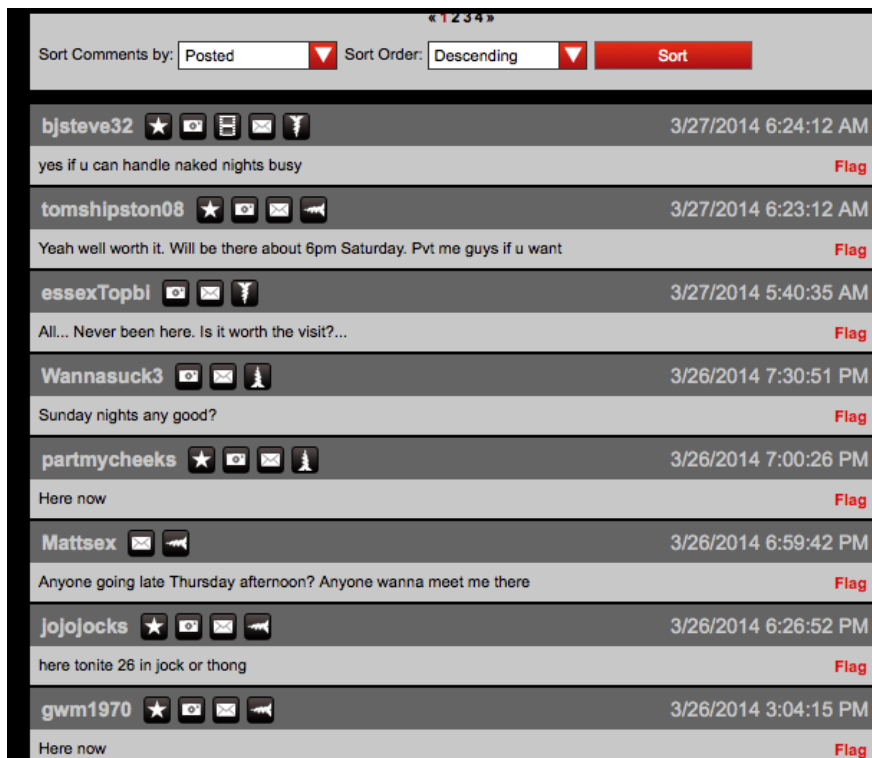


Fig.53. Squirt (2014). Screenshot showing postings from users of Squirt that shows a list of comments about a particular cruising venue. This allows users to rate the venue, ask questions about it and make it known to other users that they will be going and perhaps arrange to meet there. *Squirt*. Available from <http://www.squirt.org> [Accessed 1 August 2014].

Online cruisers are sorting in a very different way to offline ones. One of the most popular websites for meeting men online is called Gaydar.com (fig.50) named after the slang term for how gay men are able to identify each other described earlier. Gaydar.com, like several other such websites including Manhunt and GayRomeo, is a membership site that is free to join, offering basic membership that can be upgraded for a monthly fee. This upgrade allows the user to search the website differently (better) and then have access to greater material (photographs, data). Sharif Mowlabocus, in his book *Gaydar Culture*, describes how online cruising websites allow their users to search and discriminate whom they meet:

Every day in Britain thousands of men use digital platforms to search hundreds of databases in order to retrieve information about other men. This information is delivered in both textual and visual formats via search mechanisms that filter results according to the parameters defined by the operator. These search facilities are often highly developed, allowing operators to outline a detailed array of criteria and 'rules' to ensure that the information retrieved matches the operator's requirements as closely as possible (Mowlabocus, 2010, p83).

Online cruising is a fussier, slower and more pedantic process than in real space. The search terms are controlled by whoever runs the website. The process of cruising online encourages users to discriminate on the grounds of age, race and body type. Limitations on searches may depend on the relationship between search filters and emergent body types at the time. The interior page of squirt.org (fig.51) shows several options to search, e.g:

Chat > profiles (defaults to close to your geographical settings)
Chat > chatrooms (a series of categories based on types opens up)
Profiles > all profiles (defaults to close to your geographical settings)
Profiles > target search
Cruising > search (defaults to close to your geographical settings)
Cruising > target search

I cannot list the full range of possibilities here but to search the website (database) in each of these six ways will open up fresh finds. This cruising through searching data is the equivalent to the analogue walking around the park. The search results for cruising sites local to Camden (fig.52) reaps a list of thumbnails photographs and listings for known cruising venues in and around that area. These may include parks, streets, toilets, bars and other places associated with meeting strangers for sex. Owen Jones describes the pros and cons of cruising the Internet:

Technology has permanently changed the face of cruising, taking away the risk, the mess – and a lot of the excitement. Cruising on the web is a double-edged sword – simultaneously creating virtual intimacy, yet often failing to deliver actual human contact. It would be callous to dismiss the internet as only creating isolation, though. Websites dedicated to old-school cruising are vital in spreading knowledge of established cruising spots to the uninitiated, and offering tips on safety and etiquette – I don't know what I'd have done without squirt.org (Jones, 2010).

Jones' experience of cruising on squirt.org reflects my own; the best aspect of the website is the way that it signposts cruising spots and allows users to post comments about these places (fig.53). The page devoted to each cruising listing offers information including a map, photographs of the interior and exterior of the venue (amateur photographs) and information about the best times to go, who goes there and other advice. The comments posted by users underneath include warnings about the police clamping down, up-to-date advice about cruising there as well as people saying what time they will be going and asking if anyone else will be there. It is a forum. Likewise, Chatrooms offer users to meet in a less contrived way because they might meet users from all over the world and the main limitation on which they meet might mainly be time zone in this case. Chatrooms by category include:

- Bi Guys and Married men
- Cam 2 Cam jack off
- Underwear and Jockstraps
- Guys in suits
- Daddy / Boy
- Cross dressing
- Leather

Chatrooms are like different areas of the cruising ground catering to different tastes. The space of the chatroom (fig.54) is compressed into a list of people in the room (left), panel of typed comments (centre) and a panel of webcam views that those who are in the room have published and you as the user have chosen to view (right). Within the room you can participate as much or as little as you like. As in cruising outdoors one can just sit on the sidelines and be watched, or perform for the room, or enter into chat with people and take instructions on what to do for the camera etc. It is an interesting aspect to online cruising and is most open to a range of body types and ages. The people that tend to use the chatrooms are looking for equally sexually aroused types and so there tends to be a common approach. In real space if you're not interested in someone you just walk away or signal. However, in virtual cruising one can waste hours in chat finding out if someone is interested, interesting, serious about meeting etc. The

Aussie: hehe dam id be happy just with a snuggle right now!
Aussie: oh that does sound good though
(personal account).

The online conversation is a mixture of flirtation, friendly banter and a testing the waters to see if we want to meet. On this occasion after about three chats over a few days we did arrange to meet for sex. On other occasions the chat can be over before it has started; timing, location or desires may not correspond and the online chat is a way of sorting through potential sexual partners at a finer level. Mowlabocus observes a certain type of cruising behaviour translate from real into virtual space that is not necessarily about orgasm:

Sex is undoubtedly one of the potential outcomes of digital cruising, but this practice also appears to be about *queer congregation...* (Mowlabocus, 2010, p201).

As with cruising in real space the opportunity for friendship and humour to emerge amidst the often serious pose of masculinity is surprising but often. Another test of the potential sex partner is a live webcam session, which might be just to check that the person you are planning to meet corresponds to the photos they have given, if they are up to date, or this may involve masturbation. Cruising online may never result in meeting offline. The delay in getting to the orgasm seems to be a thing in itself for some people. Online cruising allows the cruiser to eek out the foreplay and the search by pouring over apparently limitless user profiles and the data they contain.

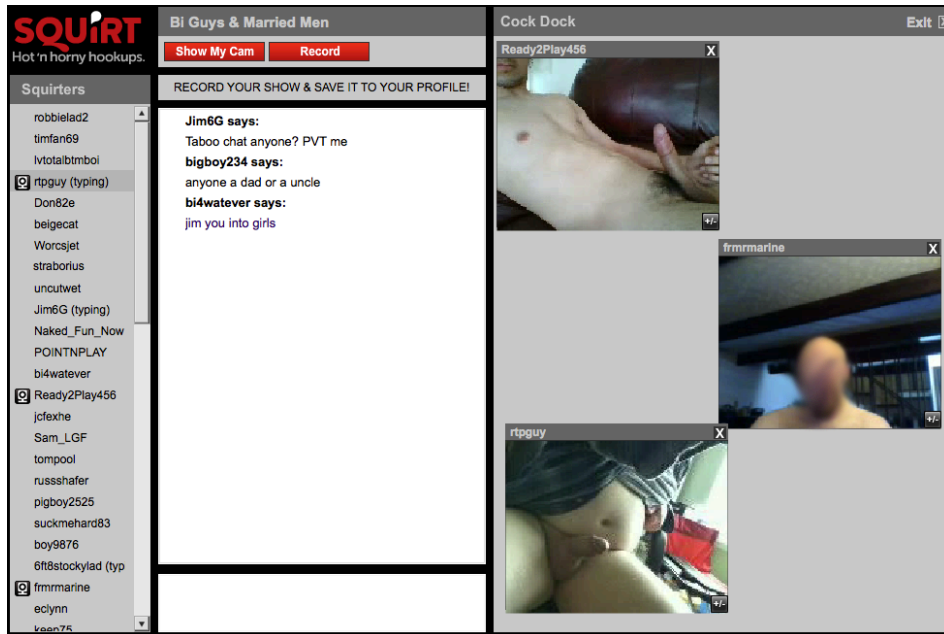


Fig.54. Squirrt (2014). Chatroom. *Squirrt*. Available from <http://www.squirrt.org> [Accessed 1 August 2014].

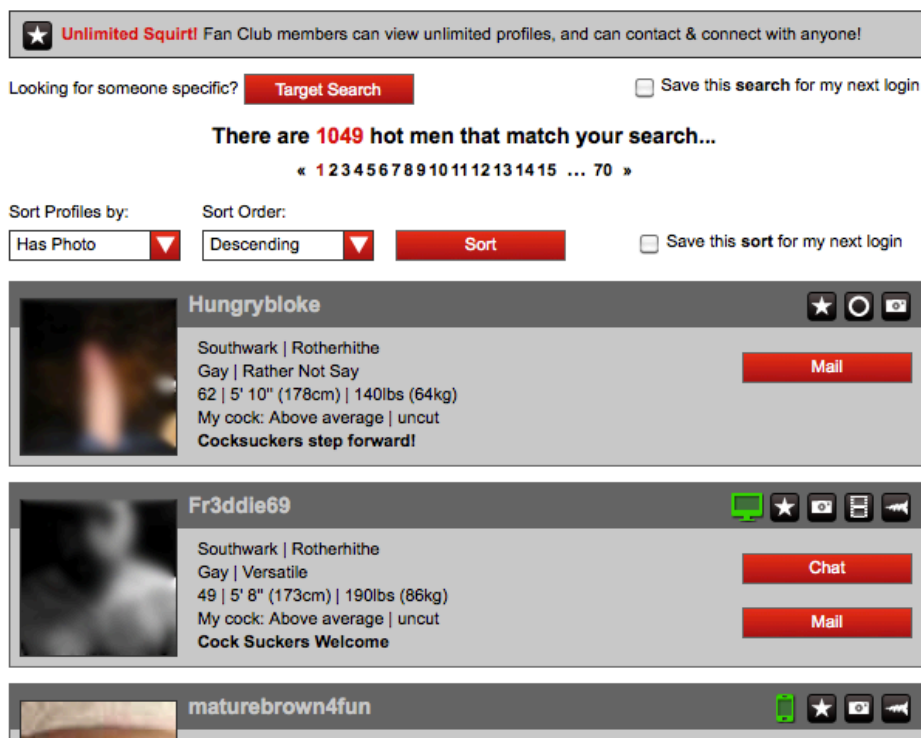


Fig.55. Squirrt (2014). Screenshot from the profile display list for squirt users local to Southwark displaying the database characteristics deemed essential by the web developers. *Squirrt*. Available from <http://www.squirrt.org> [Accessed 1 March 2014].

Different websites cater for different tastes; some are more for dating and others more for cruising for anonymous sex. Gaydar.com is an example of a website that caters for both and users tend to advertise themselves differently on the website depending on what they are looking for. Squirt.org is a cruising website that I have used off and on for over fifteen years, which advertises itself more as a cruising website offering “hot’n’horny hookups for gay and bisexual men”. As a user of a website like Gaydar.com or Squirt.org one firstly chooses a username. This is frequently a pseudonym, which may be one’s real name, but is more likely to be play on words such as “bigmanofsteel” or an obvious advert like “WHITEMAN4BLK.” Registrants of online cruising sites are asked to enter a range of information about their age, weight, eye and hair colour, body type, body hair, sexual preferences and location. The process of constructing an online cruising identity involves thinking oneself into a parallel universe, making an avatar of one’s self, using words and images. Scrolling through user profiles on squirt.org (fig.55) involves a list of fragmented body parts, abbreviated data and symbols that represent the data in visual form. Clicking on a profile that interests you will, as with craigslist, to a longer profile that will likely include a dick pic, arse pic and various private pics that can be reviewed by requesting them from the user. This is when the cruising starts; does the user like you? Do you need to release your private pics first? A game of flirting and power play ensues that involves a practiced reading between the lines of the data and an ability to type fast. Users may seek to portray themselves differently through the way they talk in chat text than they talk in person. There is a tendency towards emphasizing masculinity and adopting avatar voice. We can see in the chat quoted above that both users adopt slang idioms such as “M8” and smileys as a way of talking in a neutral voice in an attempt to secure a connection:

While the screen, the space and the software provide the first point of mediation, the second point of mediation is undoubtedly the user who has created the profile (Mowlabocus, 2010, p92).

Online cruisers can invent themselves through the use of adjusted data, new speech patterns and professional photography. The gold standard of online

cruising data is the face pic. Some people may post a face pic openly but others may conceal this vital key to their identity until certain they are interested in the person they are chatting with:

A face-pic demonstrates your investment in this space and your willingness to identify openly as gay or bisexual.

Mowlabocus continues:

The face-pic articulates issues of self-identification, honesty and integrity and many users value this form of self-representation most highly, not least because they see it as validating the profile (Mowlabocus, 2010, p103).

The way men cruise online reflects the same ambiguity of identity that exists offline; gay, bisexual and straight men all cruise for sex with other men and how they choose to define their sexuality in the broader social sphere is not necessarily related to how they present online.



Fig.56. Grindr (2014). Screen grabs showing the thumbnails that appear when you open the app to display other local users (left), the personal profile that appears when one clicks on a thumbnail (centre) and a conversation between two users that demonstrates the ability to exchange images and locations (right). Available from <http://www.grindr.com> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

3.6 Grindr

Grindr is a cruising application for smartphone that has transformed cruising since its inception in 2009. Grindr is the most popular of a range of apps, including Scruff and Tinder, which uses Global Positioning System (GPS) to help cruisers meet in virtual space. The app is downloaded onto the smartphone device. There are two versions; a free version that includes adverts and a fee-based version that allows users to be advert-free and see more other users. The screen displays a grid of user profile thumbnails (fig.56 left). These cannot depict genitalia otherwise the administrator will block them. However, they either display a facepic or more often a muscled chest. The users displayed are those closest to you at that given moment in space-time. Clicking on a thumbnail, much like on squirt.org, brings up a user profile in greater detail with the same stats and personal info (fig.56 centre). Grindr has taken the self-representation of online cruising to the next level:

What lies at the heart of every profile is the question 'how do I want to be seen?' (Mowlabocus, 2010, p92).

Mowlabocus' observation emphasises the narcissistic aspect of this type of cruising. Using Grindr to cruise is easier than ever to browse and become pickier over one's choice. The confluence of GPS technology and statistics has produced a digital equivalent of the psychogeography of the flâneur-cruiser that Mark Turner describes. Susan Buck-Morss describes, in her book *The Flâneur, The Sandwichman and the Whore*, problematises this sale-of-self within Western capitalist culture:

In commodity society all of us are prostitutes, selling ourselves to strangers; all of us are collectors of things (Buck-Morss, 1986, p104).

Grindr exemplifies the commercialisation of cruising. Cruisers have been transformed into consumers in the way that they can scroll through a list of profile photos in order to choose a sexual partner. In turn this gives you the option to start chatting with the user. At this point the user you want to chat with

may or may not be interested in which case they can ignore you, politely say no, block you as a user or hopefully reply and start cruising (fig.56 right). At this point users can exchange more photos, which can be stored in an archive for easy access and cutting and pasting, as well as sending an exact map location using the 'pin-drop' mapping feature. It becomes very easy to meet strangers for sex and makes exploring new parts of the city exciting.

Cruising is a cultural mechanism by which men can meet anonymously for sex. It is a form that has mutated during history to adapt to the cultural context of the times. In our current era in the UK in which homosexual acts between men are legal, as is gay marriage, then the meaning and purpose of cruising has changed. It may not be the necessity it once was for men who were forced to disguise their sexual preference within a more homophobic society. However, cruising may still serve a vital purpose for those men within the culture who do not identify as gay or bisexual but still seek sex with other men. Moreover, we could interpret the anonymity and anti-heteronormative structure of cruising as rebellious and actively queer act by some men. Cruising is inherently non-monogamous and is nomadic in its relations. Cruising can occur in multiple spaces or places – the train, the park, the street or the computer screen; it can occupy any given space in which people congregate. The way in which virtual spaces have emulated many of the tropes of cruising in real space suggests that there is some intrinsically erotic element to cruising that runs deep within human sexuality. Cruising is an activity in which the interactant can realign himself socially within a trajectory that presupposes orgasm but does not necessitate it.

¹ Forests are well known as “dogging” sites in which straight couples can meet and have sex with strangers in public and is as much about voyeurism and exhibitionism as it is about sex, sharing some commonalities with cruising.

² Text taken from a craigslist 'men seeking men' personals advert April 2014.

4
The Spaces of Cruising

This chapter addresses the spatial environment of cruising. In it I attempt to contextualise Alien Sex Club (ASC) within a typology of spaces for male gay sex in the modern city. The historical focus of my project begins in the late nineteenth century when bathhouses become possible spaces of sex and homosexuality is becoming defined and adopted as a self-defining practice. I will discuss cruising as an urban form since the emergence of the gay sex space coincides with the burgeoning of the Victorian city, driven by industrialisation and capitalism. In attempting to understand the contemporary spaces of sex I will also discuss the Roman Baths and Turkish Baths as historical types that inform the more recent history of the form. To accompany this chapter appendix one offers further information about the way in which sex establishments in the UK are regulated.

Cruising is not a behaviour that occurs in a void. There are several societal and spatial factors that influence where and how cruising is manifest. The Sex Club is a contemporary spatial type that builds on historical forms that have facilitated cruising for sex between men in the past. Despite digital technologies changing the way men cruise, through the introduction of virtual spaces, cruising in real space has not disappeared, as Holmes points out:

Men's desire for other men has created a landscape of spaces (real and virtual) where sex takes place in parks, alleys, restrooms, rest stops, adult theatres, video arcades, book stores, bars, gay bathhouses and finally the Internet (Holmes et al. 2007, p274).

Each of these places and spaces offers the cruiser a unique set of stimuli and possible partners that is different from the others. In this section of writing I will discuss how men have cruised by co-opting public spaces, such as toilets, porn cinemas, adult bookstores and bathhouses for sex.

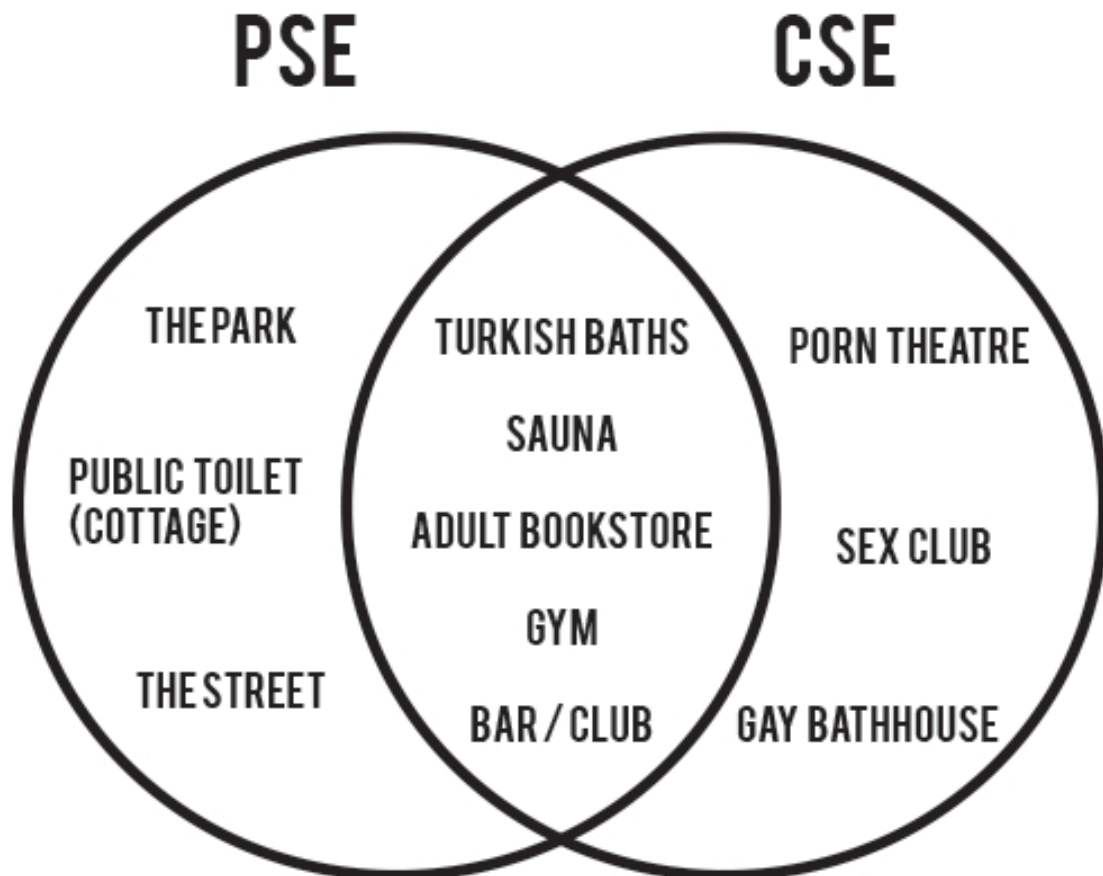


Fig.57. Walter, John (2014). *Diagram showing distinction between Public Sex Environments (PSEs) and Commercial Sex Environments (CSEs)* [Digital image].
Collection of the artist, London.

Social Science has written about the spaces of sex in a very particular way that is distinct from the architectural discourse on the subject (of which there is also less written). The conversation within social science about such spaces has been driven in part by the AIDS crisis and the desire to understand the behavioural factors affecting sexual health. In turn the attention of the social scientists has been to understand the human factors contributing towards sexual transmission risk and incorporate these observations into their interventions. Practitioners, such as Binson and Woods or Holmes and O’Byrne, have made a distinction between Public Sex Environments (PSEs) and Commercial Sex Environments (CSEs) in their observations (Woods et al. 2003). Public Sex Environments (PSEs) are spaces that are co-opted for sex as their secondary purpose whereas

Commercial Sex Environments (CSEs) are spaces that are designed specifically for sex. The public toilet is a classic example of a PSE because the primary function of the space is for men to urinate but for some men who are cruising it might have a secondary function as a space of sex:

Public sex environments (PSEs) generally can be understood to include all places outside the home where people meet to engage in sex together (Woods et al. 2003, p4).

In contrast the gay bathhouse, the porn cinema and the sex club are all classic example of CSEs since they are types of space in which the user pays an entrance fee to seek sexual stimulation either alone or with others. I have constructed the Venn diagram (fig.57) below to give some examples of PSEs and CSEs and demonstrate that there is a great deal of ambiguity and overlap between the two categories. Spaces such as straight saunas and baths, adult bookstores, gyms and clubs are ambiguous because they are commercial establishments but they are not meant for sex either, although proprietors might turn a blind eye to it. It is important to emphasise the difference between Commercial Sex Environments and brothels at this point. The commercial aspect of the CSE does not denote an exchange of money for sex with an individual but the payment of an entry fee to be in a particular space, the rules of which allow for nudity and sex to take place openly.

It's about 8.20am on a weekday morning. I know the toilets in Baker Street station to be a cruising ground and I've seen people there recently and had encounters there myself - mutual masturbation - but I need to pee on this occasion and go in knowing I might get more as well. Sure enough as soon as I go in there is a short, mid forties guy who looks professional and creative who is cruising the toilets. He makes a beeline to stand at the urinal next to me. I have finished peeing and have started to masturbate and get hard. I check that nobody is looking or is coming in and now feeling safe I look round the urinal partition to see him looking right back, catching my gaze, masturbating and showing me, pulling back his foreskin. I reach over with one hand to touch his cock and he performs a silent ecstatic moan, his eyes flicking back up into his head for me, all very performed but even the synthetic version is a turn on

for me. His eyes are wide and dilated. He touches my cock too. Somebody comes in so we pretend to be peeing again but as soon as the coast is clear we are straight back to watching each other masturbate and touching. However, he leans in to kiss me and I pull back. First time I do this he must think I am shy or nervous because he tries again but when I signal this is a 'no' he immediately zips up and leaves (personal account).

The above account is one of my own personal experiences of cruising in public toilets, otherwise known as cottaging. Cottaging is a Polari word (Baker, 2002)¹ that refers to the cottage-like appearance of many public toilets in which men look for anonymous sexual encounters together (fig.58). These toilets may occur in a number of places including parks, stations, public buildings and shopping malls. I have created a cruising map (fig.61) that charts some key London cruising spots that I will refer to here. So called cottages may also be referred to as tea-rooms in the USA. In the 1950s and 1960s when cottaging was in its heyday (the same era as Polari, which christened it) it was a haven born out of a necessity for many men. Homosexuality was illegal and many men found cottages to be one of the few places in which they could meet other men for sex (Galloway, 1983). However, cottaging was a risky activity and frequently men were arrested, and imprisoned, during this period either for acts of indecent exposure or for buggery.² Cottaging has been cemented in the mind of gay men as a cruising typology due to its history. During the progression towards the legalization of homosexuality and equality many gay men have shamed cottaging as a negative aspect of the history that needs moving away from, seeing it as a repressed form (Greves, 2016). Because of social and technological progress cottaging may no longer be the main method of cruising but it is still practiced and perhaps more importantly it is now fetishised. The website menatplay.com, which specialises in fantasies about men in suits, has created a series of videos collectively titled "Executive Glory" (fig.59), which each eroticise the anonymous suited businessman in the toilet at work. A trope central to the cottage is the gloryhole – a genitals height hole cut between cubicle partitions allowing one man to pass his penis through to a mouth or anus on the other side. Gloryholes amplify the anonymous aspect of cruising using built space to further the erotic

pleasure; they allow the imagination to work harder wondering who is on the other side, perhaps allowing the user to invent an imaginary ideal. Pornography that represents cottaging also frequently tropes graffiti (fig.60) in order to establish an erotic shorthand of the public toilet; such graffiti, like Polari, is a space in which gay men can communicate with each other in code via the cottage. People often scrawl phone numbers in public toilets with messages to get in touch for sex. My personal account of cruising the toilets at Baker Street station encapsulates the opportunism associated with cottaging. I view the cottage as a sexual pop-up and depending on the location, timing and patronage it can be more or less reliable for finding sex. The standing, waiting, non verbal eye contact, hiding behind cubicle doors or urinals, leaving hurriedly if station officials or the police are suspected of coming are all core aspects to this type of cruising. Aaron Betsky elaborates:

Urinals...are places where the public mask remains, but suddenly opens up through the appearance of the parts of the body that are usually most hidden, creating an eruption of sensuality in the aseptic, white environment of the tiled rest room (Betsky, 1997, p150).

Part of the thrill of cottaging is that it is forbidden. The danger of getting caught adds to the erotic charge. Clampdowns on cottages by the police still occur and men cottage at their own risk (Travis and Watt, 2011). As we established already cruising often occupies a liminal space between the social and the sexual and it is an activity in which the performance of self and status may become reinvented. Cottagers are skilled performers who can pass quickly between the appearance of depravity and the appearance of decorum depending on who they think the footsteps descending the stairs to the toilet belong to. The man cruising me in Baker Street in the earlier account lapsed into wanting a kiss, which itself was taboo within the rules of this anonymous encounter, and when I rebuffed him he realized that the performance had been broken and so he retreated, socially, for cover. This contrast of public and private, flesh and stone, permitted and taboo are all parts of the complex performance of concealment and revelation that men looking for sex elicit, endure and enjoy through cottaging. The cottage is a space in which transgression is performed; the man cruising me at the toilets in Baker

Street is role-playing for me when he flicks his eyes as if in premature ejaculation so as to attract and arouse me. He is playing my lover but we don't know each other. Instead we are playing each other's fantasy. To cottage, as to cruise, is a skill and a learned behaviour that one is required to apprentice in before one becomes expert. For many men now it may still be a necessity or a choice. Either because of social circumstance preventing them to meet men for sex elsewhere or because of the continued pleasure of the taboo cottaging has not died.³ The Pop star George Michael was caught cottaging in L.A. in 1998 and went on to make a song and music video, "Outside," which satirised his arrest and celebrated cruising (fig.62). The continuation of cottaging may have something to do with its core disavowal of convention, for in cottaging's supposed demise at the hands of gay marriage and Grindr it may still hold ground as a transgressive force against heterosexual norms.



Fig.58. Hucke, Matt (2006). *Example of a public toilet known to be a cottage for sex in Pond Square, London.* Available from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cottaging> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

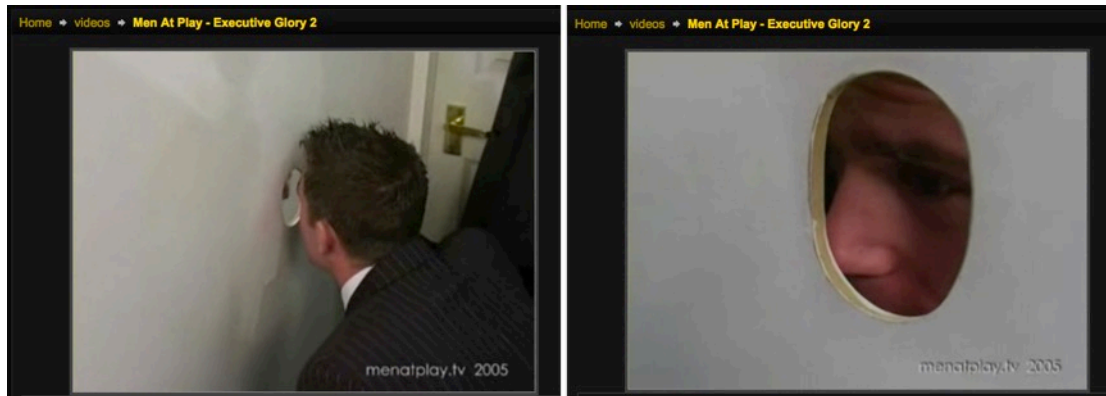


Fig.59. Menatplay (2005). *Stills from pornographic video Executive Glory 3.*
Available from http://www.xvideos.com/video304286/executive_glory_hole_3
[Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.60. Cottage Doors (2010). *Graffiti on the wall of a cottage.* Available from
<http://cottagedoors.blogspot.co.uk/2010/05/graffiti-in-public-toilets-writing-is.html> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

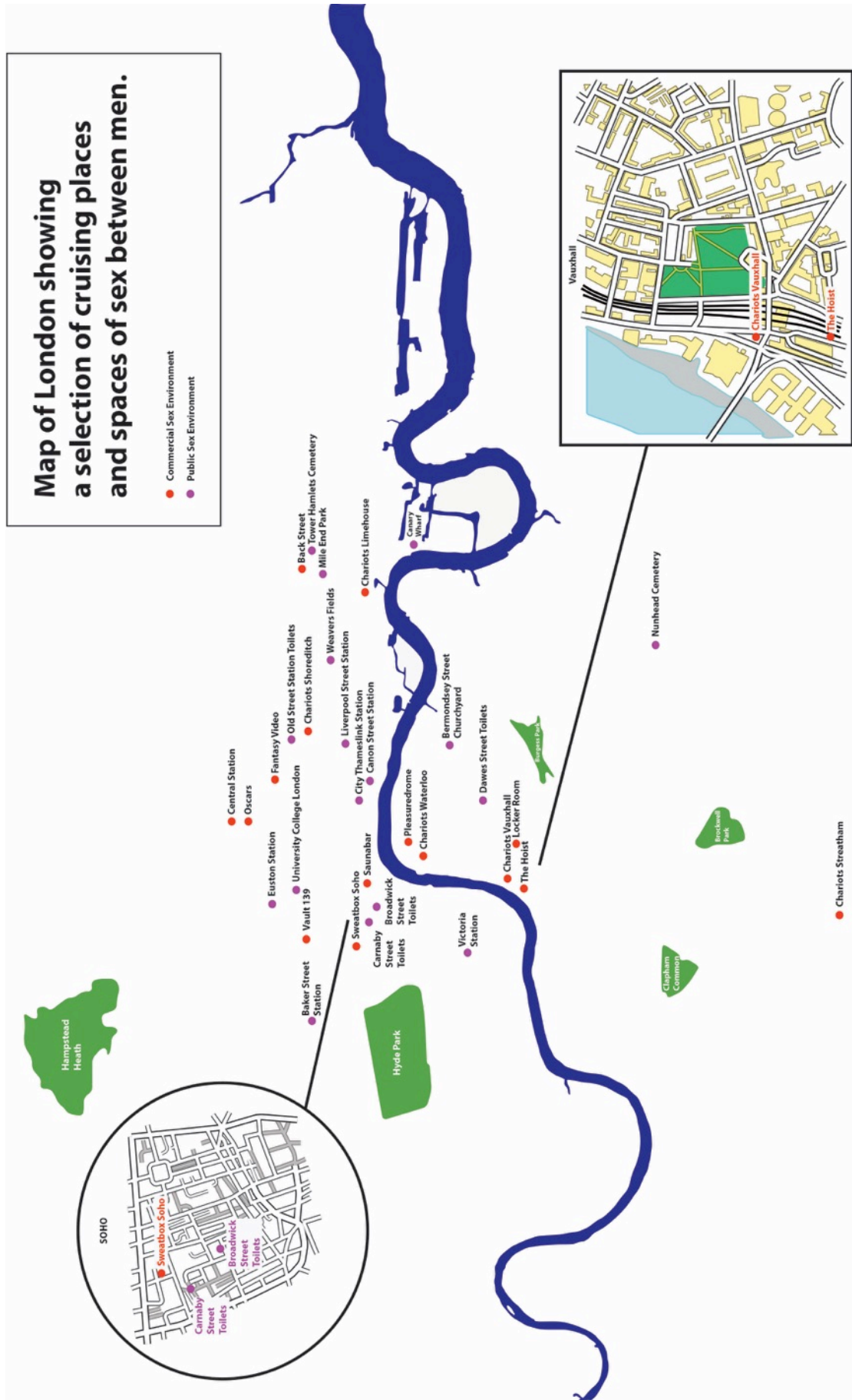


Fig.61. Walter, John (2014). *Cruising map of London* [Digital drawing]. Collection of the artist, London.

There are notable differences between the cultures of sex spaces in the USA and the UK. In the USA there is an important tradition in which men cruise for sex in adult bookstores and porn theatres, which for many years were clustered around Times Square in New York (fig.63) until the area was redeveloped. Despite successive attempts to close them down or move them to more remote parts of the city the adult bookstores still exist. Bookstores such as Vihan's Video (fig.64) in New York or Mazeworld (figs.66-14) in Germany may demonstrate themselves as selling pornographic magazines, videos and sex toys but may also say "Peep show" or "male viewing rooms," which points to, for many users, perhaps, their primary function:

They're know simply as "adult bookstores", but might better be called "sex emporiums"... Most bookstores offer more than glossy magazines and sex toys. Usually a back room features a video arcade with individual booths and screens for viewing selections of sex films (Woods et al. 2003, p178-179).

On the face of it these viewing booths are a place to screen pornographic films ahead of purchasing them but this is merely a cover for men to masturbate or engage in sexual activity with one another. One is able to cruise the bookstores at any time of the day or night. They can be seedy places and this can often be the attraction of them to those who use them for sex. A typical adult bookstore has a row of video viewing booths (fig.65) that conjoin. Each booth contains a seat (fig.68), a slot for money and buttons to operate the video channels (fig.69). These buttons may also operate a partition between adjoining booths that if both users either side press will either wind up electronically or go from opaque to translucent so that you can see each other (personal account). There is a gloryhole, which may vary in size or shape and is either a circular hole, a slit like a letterbox or a small door (fig.70). Although such spaces do not really exist in the UK I have cruised the adult bookstores in New York when I have been there:

I lived in New York for about a year-and-a-half during 2004-6 and sometimes when my boyfriend was at work I would take the subway

or walk into the city around Times Square, where there were a lot of DVD porn stores with video booths containing gloryholes at the back. I could pay a dollar to watch a movie and look through the hole and get given a dick to suck by the guy next door or vice versa. These trips were often about walking the city and killing time, filling my boredom. One porn store in particular, near 23rd Street station, fascinated me. The walls of the booths were glass and if you and the guy in the booth next to you both pressed a button the glass cleared to allow a view of each other or moved up to remove the partition. This was an enormous turn on for me. I got to know the city by cruising it. On the two visits I have made to NYC since living there I have, both times, navigated my way around by cruising. On the first visit I used Squirt and Grindr as my guides for meeting people and forming relationships both human and geographical with the city. I was staying at a hotel in midtown and met two amazing men through cruising, one Trinidadian and one Puerto Rican, both of whom I had intense nights with and one repeated the experience and continued a correspondence for several years afterward. The second visit was after a three-month residency in Maine, on my way back from which I came through New York. What was the first thing I did? Head for the Porn store with the glass partition. I found myself in the gloryhole booth getting fingered by this middle Eastern guy through the hole, then I put my dick through and he pushed it raw inside him, I fucked him for a bit and then he asked me to come to his apartment round the corner (personal account).

The anonymity afforded by cruising in the bookstore, the performance of going in and out of booths, standing around and then signaling to someone you fancy to go into a booth beside you, or just see what comes through the gloryhole is incredibly exciting (I will discuss the risk of sexual transmission at a later stage). This playful and timewasting activity, set within commercial space, again emulates the performance of cruising in the park or the street with its game of hide and seek. The adult bookstore differs from the cottage or the bathhouse in the way that entering the space from the street may protect one's identity and sexual orientation:

For a great many men the bookstores continue to be an opportunity to explore their desires for sex with men; this is especially true for those who do not identify as gay men (Woods, 2003, p183).

The adult bookstore is not a place to go to find a boyfriend, rather it is a place to go and know that what you do there stays there. Although the adult bookstores

provide an important service for many men looking for sex with other men they are ultimately commercial businesses and not social services. In recent years in New York zoning laws have been designed specifically to squeeze adult bookstores of revenue until they are forced to close down (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p550). Artist Tom Burr detailed the demise of these spaces in his 1995 installation '42nd Street Structures' at American Fine Arts in New York. In it he addresses a range of spatial types that were rare or non-existent in the UK, namely the porn theatre and the adult bookstore (figs.71-72). He critiques the political agenda leading the changes that are forcing the closure of these spaces using a sculptural and architectural approach (Burr, 1995, no page number). He builds a version of the gloryhole booths we would find in an adult bookstore out of plain wood and a box that contains an architectural model of the basement layout of such an establishment. His minimalist approach strips the original of its garish colour, imagery and advertising leaving only the space of cruising for us to see bare.

I visited Glasgow recently and made a visit to Pipeworks, a gay bathhouse located in the centre of the city tucked away in a quiet side street five minutes walk from the main shopping street. Pipeworks is entered from the street by buzzing for entry and then taking a lift to the first floor (the ground floor, beneath the bathhouse, is a pub). On exiting the lift one enters a foyer with a hatch, manned by a gentleman who takes your money (£10 before 2pm), asks you to sign in and then hands you a towel and a locker key that is numbered accordingly; you are then buzzed through into the locker room. The red lockers (about 200 of them although there were only about 30 people when I was there) line the room and there are small benches, much the same as at the public swimming pool, to sit on or balance while undressing. Once in just your towel and having locked your belongings safely away you can adventure the space with your key around your wrist on a rubber band.

There is a choice of two routes at first; through the bar / sofa / chillout area or through towards some showers. These two routes join up eventually. On this floor there is a steam room, a large Jacuzzi and access to a staircase. The second floor contains a little dark room with a two-tier padded bench. The corridor then leads through to a dry sauna, more showers, toilets and sinks, a chillout lounge with gentleman's type leather sofas and a TV (showing the tennis that day). Then there is a darkroom - really dark - in which I think there were also two gloryholes (on one

walk through this space someone had spilled lubricant on the floor and it was dangerously slippery). This finally leads on to a circuit of private rooms that all contain black padded mattresses, lockable doors and mounted on the wall are lubricant dispensers and rolls of paper towel.

I spent about two hours at the bathhouse that day. At first I walked around just trying to build a mental map of the space and work out what was there / if I had missed anything. After about twenty minutes of this initial excitement, and trying to ascertain who was there, I was ready to choose to be in one particular space for a while.

It was extremely clean. Mostly it was painted black but there were some other colours. Compared to other spaces I have been to there was more contrast between open areas and narrow corridors (personal account).

The gay bathhouse emerges as a form during the middle of the twentieth century as a variant upon the Turkish baths and the Roman baths. The Turkish baths, or hammam, is characterised by its use of steam and a separation of the sexes. The Islamic influence on the separation of the sexes meant that the Turkish baths was traditionally a place where it was socially acceptable for men to go to be together. In Islam, like many cultures, water has a symbolic quality as a purifying force and is associated with religious ablutions. A nineteenth century pamphlet "The Hammam of the Turks" (1867) explores how the baths were traditionally recommended as a treatment for a wide range of ailments from mental health, cholera and hydrophobia through to treating cattle. It goes on to describe entering the hammam:

Push open the swinging doors and enter. To the left, now, into the vestaire, where you hang up hat and overcoat, and deposit in safe custody such valuables as you may have about you, and take your admission ticket, and your distinguishing number engraved upon a white metal medal. Then down the short flight of stairs, between the floating red curtains, under the great lamp blazoned with the Crescent and the Star, through another pair of swing-doors; and you are in the frigidarium, to speak classically, of the Bath (The Hammam of the Turks, 1867 p38).

The twinning of ablutions (the washing away of sins) and sexual transgressions propelled each other along in these spaces in the mid-twentieth century. The Savoy Turkish baths on Jermyn Street in London (fig.73) became a well-known

place in which men met for sex including many famous men of the day such as Rock Hudson, Benjamin Britten, W H Auden and Christopher Isherwood (Shifrin, 2011). The hammam became a fraternal space in which sex between men was anticipated as a kind of open secret. More recent spaces of sex quote the spatial tropes of the hammam in order to suggest the association between physical as well as mental hygiene that the Turkish baths implies. The architecture of the hammam is full of Islamic architectural tropes, the exoticism of which, during the Victorian era, helped facilitate their export from Turkey to other European and North American countries. The Turkish baths were often ornate and decorative, using colour, pattern, mosaic and fretwork screens to add spatial depth and beauty to the space (fig.74). The import of this architecture to non-Muslim countries for its exoticism also imported a code of behaviour that was inherent to these structures too. The Turkish baths shares many commonalities with the Roman baths, a series of spaces marked by temperatures transitions. A well-known chain of gay bathhouses in London, known as Chariots, which has branches across the city, associates with this tradition in its branding (fig.75). Gay bathhouse culture has often tried to give itself a weightier pedigree by playing up the association with the Romans or Turks as if to suggest that the Classical backing justifies something that some may consider seedy or frown upon.



Fig.62. Michael, George (1998), Outside. *YouTube*. Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwZAYdHcDtU> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.63. Pinterest (2016). *Peep land - Times Square, New York, during the 1980's before the 'cleanup' of the 1990's and the removal of porn cinemas through re-zoning*. Available from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/217369119489416681/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.64. Dávila, Alejandro (2013). *Porno stores dwindle in Midtown*. Available from <http://themidtowngazette.com/2013/09/porno-stores-dwindle-in-midtown/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.65. Jeremiah's Vanishing New York (2012). *Peep World*. Typical corridor of video viewing booths in an adult bookstore. Available from <http://vanishingnewyork.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/peep-world.html> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.66. Mazeworld (2010). *Adult bookstore, Berlin*. Available from <http://www.travelyourassoff.com/2012/03/maze-world-home-of-gay-labyrinth-berlin.html> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.67. Mazeworld (2010). *Advertising on exterior of Mazeworld adult bookstore*. Available from <http://www.travelyourassoff.com/2012/03/maze-world-home-of-gay-labyrinth-berlin.html> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.68 (left). Mazeworld (2016). *Seat in a video booth*. Available from <http://www.yelp.com/biz/maze-world-berlin> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

Fig.69 (right). Mazeworld (2016). *Channel switcher for TV in video booth – also to operate frosted partition between booths in certain cases.*
<http://www.yelp.com/biz/maze-world-berlin> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.70. Mazeworld (2016). *Door in a video booth through to the next booth (large gloryhole).* <http://www.yelp.com/biz/maze-world-berlin> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.71. Burr, Tom (1995). *42nd Street Structures* [Installation, detail]. American Fine Arts, New York.

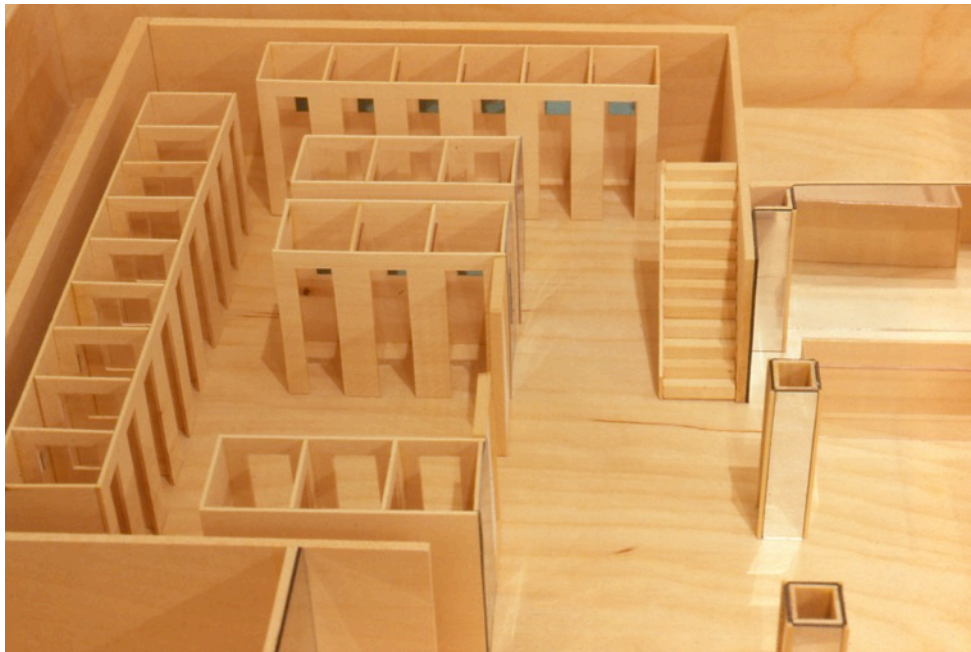
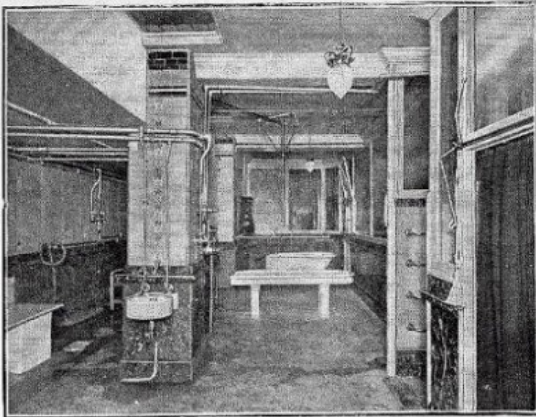


Fig.72. Burr, Tom (1995). *42nd Street Structures* [Installation, detail]. American Fine Arts, New York.

A NEW TURKISH BATH HOUSE.
 Work House Hydro,
 12, YORK STREET, JERMYN STREET, ST. JAMES', S.W.
 (AT BACK OF ST. JAMES' CHURCH, PICCADILLY).
OPEN DAY AND NIGHT. NEVER CLOSED.



PORTION OF SHAMPOOING ROOM.

Hydropathic Treatment as at Mallock, Buxton, Harrogate, Bath, &c.

FIXED MODERATE TARIFF:			
TURKISH BATH, including	RIZ DOUCHE	3/6	HARHEIM BATHS,
Vapour Bath and Shampoo	3/6		HIGH FREQUENCY TREATMENT
ELECTRIC LIGHT BATH	4/6		and other
VIBRATORY MASSAGE	3/6		MEDICAL APPLICATIONS GIVEN
ELECTRICAL Do.	3/6		UNDER PRESCRIPTION ONLY.
HAND Do.	3/6		
	LIVER PACKS	3/6	

SUITES—BACHELOR CHAMBERS IN CONNECTION WITH THE BATHS
TO LET AT MODERATE RENTALS.

Fig.73. Shifrin, Malcolm (2011). *Advertisement for the Turkish Baths on Jermyn Street in London.* Available from <http://www.nickelinthemachine.com/2011/04/the-turkish-baths-in-jermyn-street/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

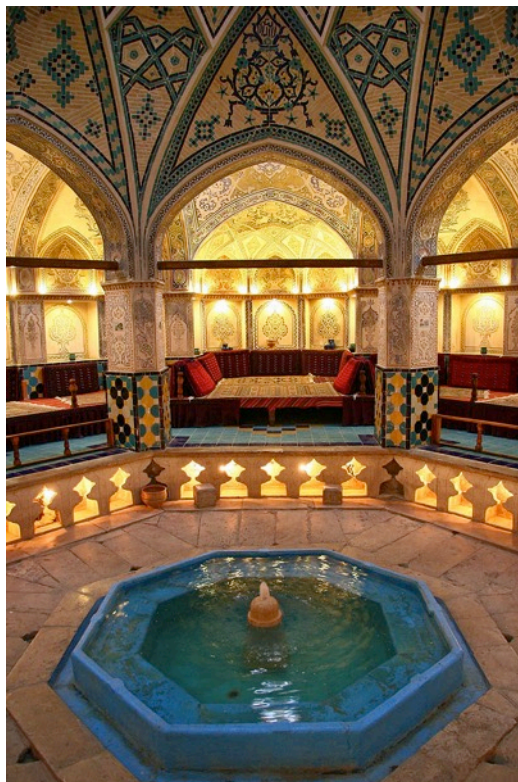


Fig.74. Ghaemi, Mohsen (2008). *Ornate Islamic decoration of the Sultan Amir Ahmad Bathhouse, Iran*. Available from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Soltan_amir_bath_house3.jpg [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig. 75. Dazed Digital (2016). *The Entrance to former Chariot's gat bathhouse in Liverpool Street, London*. Available from <http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/29714/1/what-the-loss-of-london-s-gay-saunas-means-for-us> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

The gay bathhouse is a space allocated specifically for cruising for sex between men, rejecting the ambiguity of repurposed spaces such as cottages. Woods and Binson suggest that the gay bathhouses were spaces associated with the move towards gay liberation:

It was a later generation of gay men who, partly by using the gay bathhouses, learned to enjoy having sex with and loving other gay men. At a time when no one was saying “gay is good”, the creation of an institution in which gay men were encouraged to appreciate each other was a major step toward gay pride (Woods, 2003, p38).

They were spaces of discovery and experimentation, test sites for sexuality. This may seem controversial now, almost fifty years later, when many gay men see bathhouses as un-liberated spaces (Smith, 2014). Prior and Cusack suggest that an identifiably gay culture emerged partly because of the culture of the

bathhouse They argue that the bathhouse is a space allocated specifically for men who have sex with men start to thinking of themselves as gay and look to have sex with each other rather than with other straight men, which was a cultural shift at that time:

“Without clothes and status, naked and stripped of their identity, these men were empowered to reach depths within themselves that they might otherwise not have reached” (Prior and Cusack, 2008, p276).

The bathhouse may have been a nurturing environment, free from homophobia, for some men in a social as well as a sexual way. Perhaps access to this environment gave them confidence to display their homosexuality outside of the baths in their daily lives. For many men the bathhouses were spaces in which they could meet for sex as well as friendship with other men, whether they defined themselves as gay, bisexual or straight (Groves et al. 2007). Gay bathhouses drew on their forerunners, the Turkish and Roman baths, and eroticised them:

The drama of the baths was unmistakable. Their vaults were so large, and the steam from the water so intense, that they created a dream world where strict orders defining the public spaces of the rest of the city disappeared...

...Instead of a functional floor divided into many different spaces, there were pools of water, massage tables, niches, and benches built into the structure (Betsky, 1997, p37).

Betsky's description of the baths is of a fantasy space, an escape from the grime and homophobia of the city streets in which the body could float for a moment in the ethereal haze of steam rooms. This is highly romanticised but I think there remains some truth in this; from my own visits to the sauna I can see it as a hermetically sealed zone in which time can be ignored and there are no signs of the outside world due to the lack of windows. It is an inward looking space. Betsky goes on to argue that bathhouses are archetypically queer spaces:

Gay bathhouses are sites where eroticism and pleasure are not constrained; they appear to be disconnected from society at large, but they are not. We believe that gay bathhouses are micro-societies where naked Eros, in the guise of nude males, combines water, steam, heat and

sexually charged events to choreograph a heady, complex dance, which has evolved over time (Holmes, 2007, p275).

The escapism offered by the baths performed an important social function for its patrons. Like their Roman forerunners, gay bathhouses, especially in New York during the 1970s, became places of entertainment as well as of sex, socialising and leisure:

There's usually plenty to do without having sex at all, including exercise classes, gyms, feature movies, reading, parties, sunbathing (Woods, 2003 p156).

All the spatial tropes of the Roman Baths, the frigidarium, caldarium, tepdarium etc. have been updated and added to in order to create the gay bathhouse form. The range of services and spaces on offer at these institutions varies from place to place and has fluctuated over time depending on the social climate:

Throughout the 1970s and 1980's, gay bathhouses offered their patrons a variety of new services: snack bars and cafes, dance floors for disco and country-western dancing... (Woods, 2003, p41).

The Continental Baths (figs.76-77) was famed for the entertainment it had on offer under its roof; Bette Midler (nicknamed Bathhouse Betty for her time there), Barry Manilow and Patti LaBelle all started their careers performing at the Continental (Avery, 2013, no page number).



Fig.76 (left). The Ansonia Hotel (1905). *Home of the Continental Baths*. Available from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continental_Baths [Accessed 1 August 2016]. Fig.77 (right). Continental Baths (1970s). *Interior of The Continental baths in New York, 1970s*. Available from <http://nymag.com/realestate/features/apartments/freeman-gunter-2011-4/index1.html> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.78. Sweatbox (2016). *The exterior of Sweatbox Soho – the building is on three levels with a gym on the ground floor and a two level bathhouse below*. Available from <http://www.citikey.co.uk/display/the-sweatbox-3XJF9> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

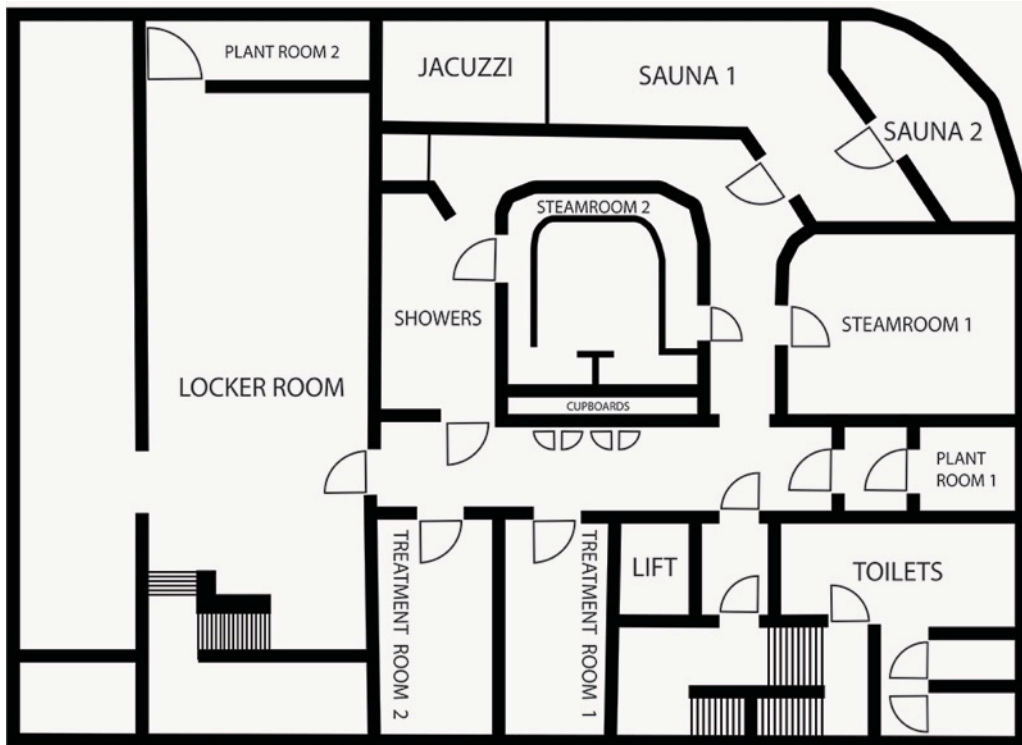


Fig.79. Walter, John (2015). *1st Floor plan of Sweatbox Soho* [Digital drawing].
Collection of the artist, London.

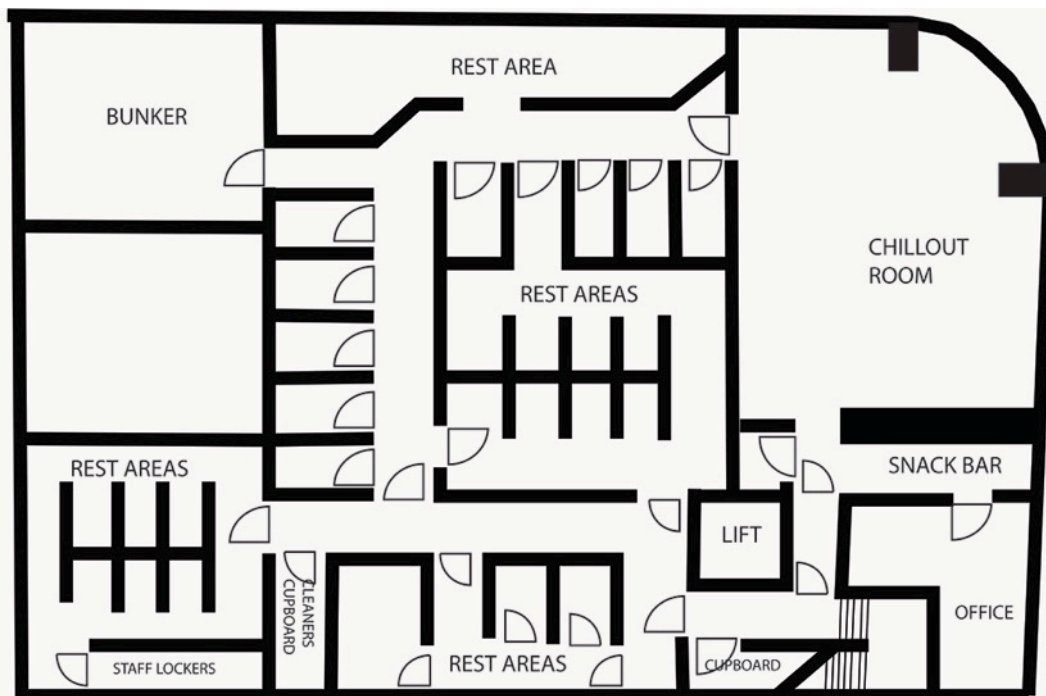


Fig.80. Walter, John (2015). *2nd Floor plan of Sweatbox Soho* [Digital drawing].
Collection of the artist, London.



Fig.81 (left). Sweatbox (2016). *Gym*. <http://www.sweatboxsoho.com> [Accessed 1 August 2016]. Fig.82 (right). Sweatbox (2016). *Locker Room*. <http://www.sweatboxsoho.com> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.83 (left). Sweatbox (2016). *Jacuzzi*. Available from <http://www.sweatboxsoho.com> [Accessed 1 August 2016]. Fig.84 (right). Sweatbox (2016). *Foam Party*. <http://www.sweatboxsoho.com> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

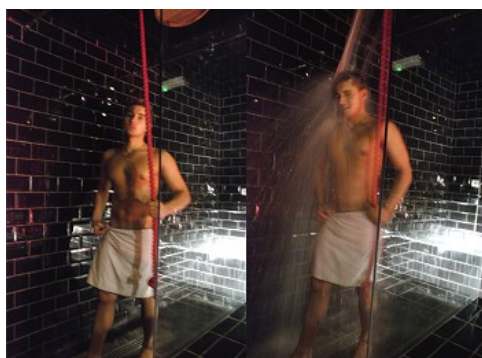


Fig.85 (left). Sweatbox (2016). *Showers*. <http://www.sweatboxsoho.com> [Accessed 1 August 2016]. Fig.86 (right). Sweatbox (2016). *Sauna*. <http://www.sweatboxsoho.com> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.87. Sweatbox (2016). *Private Rooms*. <http://www.sweatboxsoho.com>
[Accessed 1 August 2016].

The gay bathhouse became a parallel society in which its patrons could spend long periods of time away from the world outside. This prolonged stay within the space was encouraged using spatial design:

The bathhouse was constructed to facilitate initiatory exploration, through darkness, tunnels, mazes, and other architectural features (Prior and Cusack, 2008. p279).

Gay bathhouses are often a warren of interconnected rooms. Sweatbox Soho is a gay bathhouse in London (fig.78) that features a gym, locker room, jacuzzi, showers, sauna and private rooms (figs.81-87). It also hosts regular “foam parties” in which foam is pumped into the space allowing for anonymity that

extends on the idea of the steam room as a visual field in which the body can be submerged, hidden, disguised, fragmented, objectified and thus engaged with sexually in a cruisy way. The designs of gay bathhouses have grown more complex over time, beginning to imitate other cruising spaces using spatial forms:

The innermost region, and the largest part of the domain, was the 'playspace', designed to facilitate sexual exploration. Nearest the entrance were spaces designed for transition in and out of the bath, casual solicitation and rest from the intensity of the sexual explorations within the playspace (Prior and Cusack, 2008. p275).

A journey is established from entering the space until leaving. A vestibule often gives way to a corridor that swells and contracts to create contrasting atmospheres and experiences that are enacted through walking (a prerequisite of cruising). Corridors guide the patron around a series of discrete spaces that contain different pleasures:

Throughout the 1970s proprietors introduced a variety of new types of spaces including mazes/bunk rooms, theatrettes/porn rooms, darkrooms, spa/whirl pools, glory holes, mirrored rooms, themed cubicles, carousel showers, and an increase in passageways (Prior and Cusack, 2008, p276).

The experience of cruising the gay bathhouse becomes one of constantly circulating the space through walking, pacing and wandering; in the same way that one would cruise the heath, street or internet, the space has been designed to sustain interest by allowing for variation to emerge out of repetition. It is as though through walking one might incant a lover. Looking at the floor plans for Sweatbox Soho (figs.79-80) we may observe the layout of these elements, the second floor containing a large number of gloryhole booths and a chillout lounge or relaxation space. Gay bathhouses vary in the stylishness of their décor and the cleanliness:

A nongay observer may only see long, lurid hallways with rooms on either side, doors opening and closing, men entering and leaving, and a seemingly endless walking around routine with apparently little sex (Woods and Binson, 2003 p155).

Gay bathhouses are colloquially thought of as seedy places and whilst this may be the case for some, for the vast majority they are places of constant cleaning and renovation. Many bathhouses are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and so the upkeep never stops. For larger renovations the bathhouse may have to be closed for a period of time.⁴ The initial design of these places is unclear, although I have spoken to one Scottish architect⁵ who designed a bathhouse in Edinburgh early in her career and she reported a culture of 'gay builders' who are likely to be the contractors for such jobs. The job of the designer or builder of the bathhouse space is to design a man-made forest in which men can cruise each other. It is a form of narrative architecture, as Nigel Coates (2012) might call it, in which the space is organised to create a spatial story through movement. He is speaking here about his design for a clothing store but the principle applies to the bathhouse also:

Their intention was to create parallel worlds where you could try on their designs, and safely experiment with your identity. These environments needed to stir up ideas and lift their function to a level at which anything seemed possible, which is how these designers wanted you to feel in their clothes. The space would limber you up to think laterally, and up your confidence (Coates, 2012, p116).

Coates describes what Betsy might call a queer space in which the social transformation is through the putting on of clothes whereas the bathhouse functions using the reverse process. The clothes store and the bathhouse both use spatial design to ignite the imagination for narrative, as well as commercial, purposes.

Like the set of a play the bathhouse is organised to synthesise public space and create a microcosmic cruising city. Turning the corner one more time might just allow for that chance encounter with the cruiser who has just arrived or the one you hadn't spotted yet:

In place of sight, which fostered inhibition, the low-level lighting fostered the immediacy of touch, smell, taste and wordless sounds, as avenues of

discovery that involved bodies that were often barely visible. This was further enhanced by the narrowing passageways, permitting men to 'lose all inhibition about being touched'. Mirrors, strobe lights, and clouds of hot mist compounded the disorientation and confusion in the disinhibited and touch-based sexual exploration (Prior and Cusack, 2008, p277).

Imitating the darkroom historically found in gay bars, where people can have sex, the gay bathhouse expands on this type of space in order to facilitate sexual exploration:

The architecture of bathhouses creates an environment of multiple public, semi-public and private spaces where men can challenge prevailing conventions through the "guarantee" of a sexual encounter; bathhouses multiply the faces of desire and promote sexual diversity (Prior and Cusack, 2008, p274).

Gay bathhouses are certainly places in which one can act promiscuously although many choose not to. However, the height of gay bathhouses popularity was unfortunately timed with the emergence of HIV and the AIDS crisis and so as time went on they became spaces associated with disease, as opposed to health.

During the early AIDS crisis bathhouses were perceived as spaces of promiscuity, having been linked previously to outbreaks of sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis (Woods and Binson, 2003). In a panic to control the spread of AIDS bathhouses became a contested site and many were closed down during the 1980s and 1990s as a public health policy that was controversial amongst politicians, bathhouse owners and patrons and scientists:

To defend its case for closure, the Health Department has already begun to stigmatize segments of the gay community. It has called bathhouse owners "merchants of death" and bathhouse patrons "Evil Knievels of medicine" (Woods and Binson, 2003 p52).

The dramatic language reflects the fear and panic caused by the crisis and the lack of measured debate that was going on due to the lack of scientific and sociological data available to policy makers at that stage. Many structural

changes were made to the space of bathhouses in an attempt to change behaviours that were perceived to be risky:

When the 'Summer of Love' in 1967 created a new communal ethic among the hippie generation, "orgy rooms" were installed in some bathhouses where group sex became more popular (Woods and Binson, 2003, p39).

Orgy rooms were removed as it was felt that reducing promiscuity was key to the reduction of the transmission of HIV. However, better policy was to promote safer sex through condom use and verbally testing potential partners by questioning them before intercourse. In the San Francisco debate Bobbi Campbell, who represented People With AIDS (PWA), suggested that closing the bathhouses "is not the real issue; rather the issue is the education of gay men as to what *specific sexual practices* carried risks for AIDS" [their emphasis] (Woods and Binson, 2003, p89). Much work has been done to make bathhouses spaces that promote safe sex through the use of poster campaigns and access to free condoms and lubricant. A lot of research has been done into the sexual transmission risk associated with the behaviour that occurs in these spaces (which I will explore in a later section). The closure of the baths in the 1980's on the grounds of preventing the spread of AIDS is in fact linked to the earlier closures of the baths on legal and homophobic grounds, as Bérubé argues, it is "yet another government campaign to dismantle gay institutions" (Woods and Binson, 2003 p53). The raids that had gone on in gay bathhouses and clubs over the years had developed an antagonistic relationship between many representatives of gay and AIDS groups and government. The effect of this period in the history of the bathhouses is still felt in North America, and to some extent in the UK, where limitations exist on what behaviour can go on in sex spaces such as gay bathhouses, sex clubs, porn cinemas and adult bookstores, varying from state to state. These are obviously difficult to police, some of the enforcement being done by establishments themselves, some by policing and mostly by zoning policy. In New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani forced through zoning laws that restricted the location, quantity and scale of sexual businesses:

In October 1995, the New York City Council passed a new zoning law by a forty-one to nine vote. The Zoning Text Amendment covers adult book

and video stores, eating and drinking establishments, theatres, and other businesses. It allows these businesses only in certain areas zoned as nonresidential, most of which turn out to be on the waterfront. Within the new reserved districts, adult businesses are disallowed within five hundred feet of another adult establishment or within five hundred feet of a house of worship, school or day-care centre. They are limited to one per lot and in size to ten thousand square feet. Signs are limited in size, placement and illumination (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p551).

This zoning culture affecting gay bathhouses was part of a general trend towards 'cleaning up the city', which was a euphemism for gentrification and a commercial bias towards redevelopment. This transformed the urban environment of New York and San Francisco, pushing the bathhouse culture underground. It is debatable whether or not such policies had an effect on rates of HIV transmission or just gave the general population a sense that government was doing something to protect them from AIDS.



Fig.88. Vault 139 (2016). Website for sex club Vault 139 showing daily schedule including prices and dress codes. Available from <http://www.vault139.com/day-by-day/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.89. Vault 139 (2016). *Entrance to Vault 139 from the street.* Available from <http://london.gaycities.com/bars/2093-the-vault> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

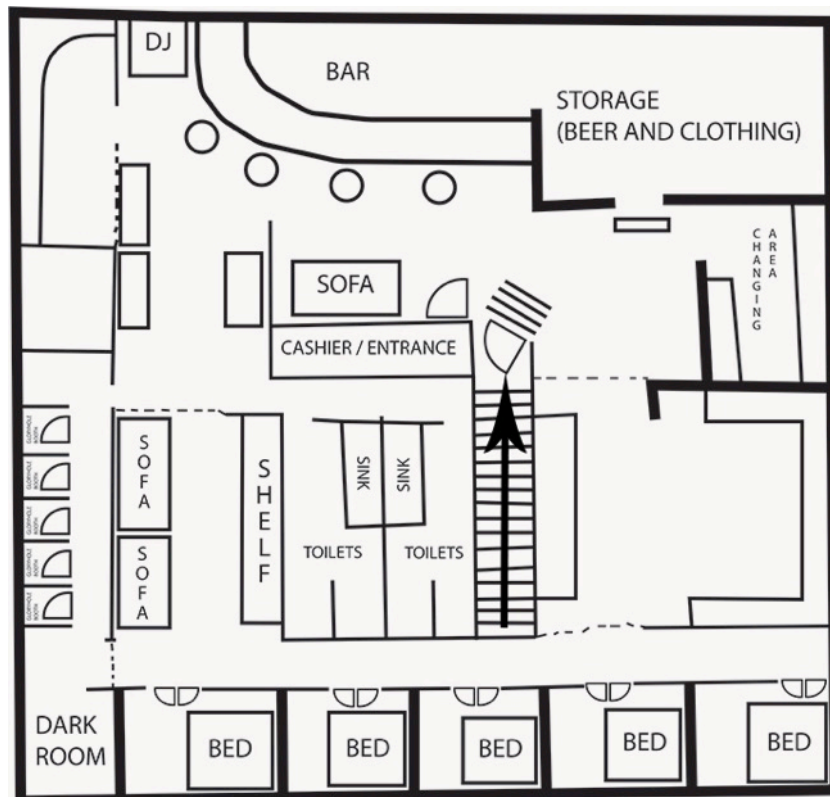


Fig.90. Walter, John (2014). *Plan of Vault 139* [Digital drawing]. Collection of the artist, London.

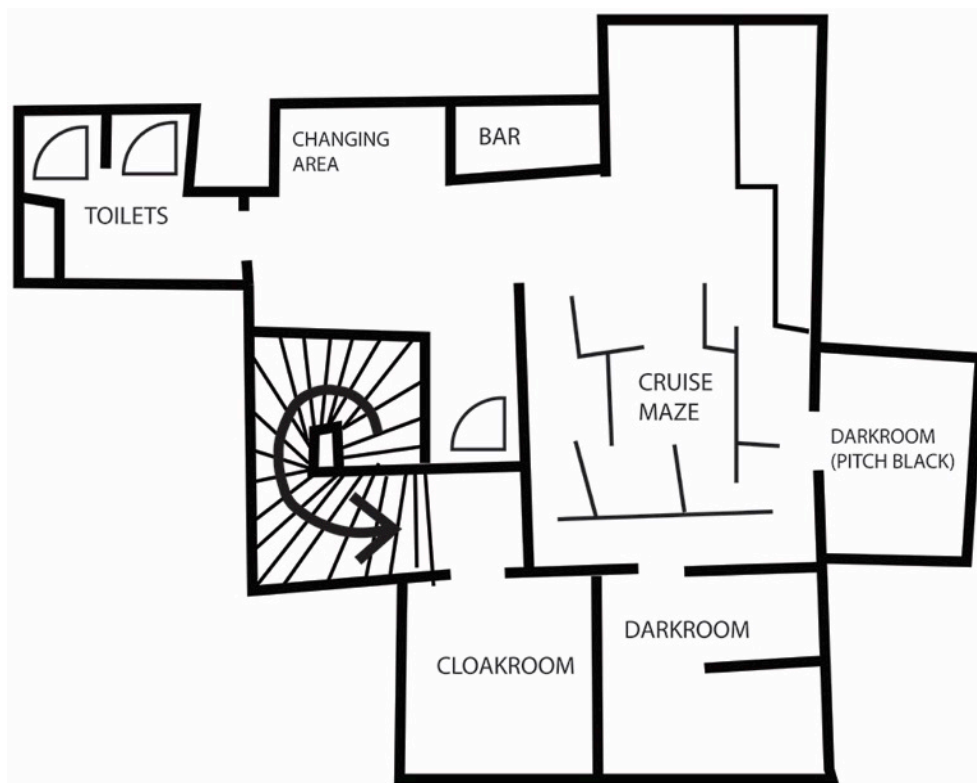


Fig.91. Walter, John (2014). *Plan of Central Station in Kings Cross* [Digital drawing]. Collection of the artist, London.

Sex clubs are a very recent spatial type, which draw on the existing tropes of the bathhouse, the cottage and the adult bookstore. The sex club is distinct from the bathhouse in that it does not involve the pretext of water and cleansing but retains the opportunity for sexual encounters, making the purpose of the visit for sex more explicit. Woods and Binson (2003) compare the sex club to a cross between a bathhouse and a backroom bar:

The darkened orgy rooms and glory holes offer a sense of mystery, intrigue, and a flush of excitement. Some men seek sex in these environments for the thrill of it; others welcome the anonymity and privacy that darkness provides (Woods and Binson, 2003, p197).

Sex clubs help facilitate and fetishise men having together anonymously. Typically the appearance of a sex club is characterised by black ceilings, trance

or techno music, mirrors, TV sets with porn producing light, chains and shackles, private rooms and gloryhole rooms. There is a quality to the space of the sex club that is more raw and functional than that of the bathhouse, since it has been stripped of any pretext other than sex. Attendees of the sex club are either clothed, naked or dressed in particular fetish gear depending on the time of day or night specified by the dress code. For example, Hoist in Vauxhall (www.thehoist.co.uk) is a well-known leather and fetish club that changes night by night. At Vault 139 (fig.89) in London there are some times of the day and night where clothes must be worn, others just underwear and shoes and others naked save for footwear (fig.88). On entering the club on a “naked” night one can undress in a changing area and rather than checking your clothes in to a locker, as in the bathhouse, you are given a basket and a corresponding number to leave your clothes with the barman, who will retain them until you are ready to leave. Your ticket is given to you in a palm-sized Ziplock bag that also contains a condom, a sachet of lubricant and a free drink token. You can keep this, along with your money or credit card, tucked in your sock. If you lose the ticket with the number for your clothes they can be traced using the initials you gave on entering.

Without the excitement of risk associated with sex in cottages or adult bookstores the sex club is forced to invent new ways of simulating the adrenalin rush of cruising. Vault 139 is a basement laid out in a circular way around the staircase down which patrons enter (fig.90); going clockwise from the entrance there is the changing area, which shows porn on a monitor, then an open orgy area surrounded by padded seating, very dark areas and a mirrored wall, then a long corridor of private rooms with swing doors that can be locked. The walls are built of corrugated metal, slatted wood and painted plaster. Each private room contains a raised bed with black padded wipe-down mattress. At the end of the corridor is a row of gloryhole booths that lead round to an area of leather couches, the toilets and then the bar, which has a DJ booth, hardcore porn playing on a monitor and a side room with more padded benches and porn that is partly screened by a mesh curtain. It is dark; there is some UV light, the light of

the glass-fronted bar fridges and the light of TV screens. It is arranged in a variety of ways that encourage Patrons to stay longer in the space through a series of spatial arrangements designed to entertain and baffle.

One of the most ingenious devices introduced into the playspace, which dramatically increased the men's journey, was the maze (Prior and Cusack, 2008, p276).

The cruise maze is not a maze like those at Longleat or Hampton Court, rather it may be a temporary structure made from netting hung from the ceiling that is designed to simulate the forest of cruising outdoors. This is a key feature of the sex club Central Station in Kings Cross, which conforms to type by restaging spatial elements associated with public sex within a private one:

In the 1970s, fantasy environments were installed that recreated the erotic situations that were still illegal, public and dangerous outside the walls of the baths. Glory holes recreated the toilets. Mazes recreated park bushes and undergrowth. Steam rooms and gyms recreated the YMCA and Video rooms recreated the balconies and back rows of the movie theatres. Cells recreated and transformed the environment of prisons and jails, where generations of gay men have ended up for risking sex in toilets, parks and the YMCA (Woods and Binson, 2003, p40).

The sex club is a typology that has developed by mimicking, hyperbolising and formalizing the spaces of public sex. This is a peculiarly postmodern form of cruising, employing many of the aspects of sequence narrative that Nigel Coates argues for, a kind of "psychological configuration of styles:"

...the most straightforward kind of narrative has to be the 'binary'. This constitutes investing the object or 'situation' with a parallel identity – not one derived from function but trans-function – that is a function of the mind, a transgression, a sublimation, a presence from the imagination that can 'heat up' the otherwise banal object (Coates, 2012, p83).

The sex club is a safe space in which transgression can be performed - a cruising theme park that quotes and restages historical and social spaces of cruising within a safe zone. The tropes of gloryhole, private room, orgy room, bar, corridor, porn cinema all concretise as new sex club types, equivalent to the

Frigidarium and Calidarium of the Roman baths, but purposed solely for sex between men. Coates' architectural aims, which are not meant for the sex club, but are queer, yet again apply to this context:

By providing associative triggers to enhance the visitor's experience, I have tried to create hybrid environments where identity can be experimented with and ideas stirred up. In some projects I have explored the use of sequence narrative to visually choreograph visitors into and around spaces; in others I have the choice of path wide open. I found that there is no harm in including elements that at first appear incongruous or contradictory – on the contrary, they can add to the user's experience of the space, by keeping the mind constantly active and questioning (Coates, 2012, p129).

Within the sex club there are unique spatial, design or decorative moments that mark the venue out as unique. In the case of Vault this is a use of chain metal curtains at strategic points within the space that give it an industrial feel. Coates' theory of architectural space and its influence on the behaviour of the inhabitant and their sense of self could easily be a description of the experience of the sex club patron. The sex club is like a sexual shopping mall in which the cruiser can stage their own advertisement of orgasm. It is a simulation, bureaucratization and commercialization of cruising in public. Does the role-play of risk that occurs in the sex club mean that nothing transgressive is going on? Has all the danger of cruising the public toilet and the thrill of getting caught gone? We have seen throughout cruising and the spaces of cruising that there is performance going on; whether it is in the performance of masculinity needed to seduce the man you want while cruising on Hampstead Heath or the use of hyper-masculine language cruising a chatroom online or the performance of social transgression that goes on in the sex club, the turn on is no less authentic. The Sex Club is a space in which gay men can come and recharge their social selves by displacing their bodies within an architectural narrative that encourages nudity, anonymity and role play.

The spaces of sex that I have identified and the existence of the sex club as a specific type of space inform the design of ASC. The cruise maze becomes a

leitmotif for an installation within which a diverse range of artifacts can be curated and an architectural narrative of cruising and HIV risk can be developed.

¹ The 1950's gay slang popularised by Kenneth Williams and Hugh Paddick in the radio comedy "Round the Horne" (1965). Polari is a lexicon of words that gay men used within an English grammar to codify their sexuality.

² Under the Sexual Offences Act 2003 engaging in sexual activity in a public lavatory is outlawed.

³ See www.squirt.org for current cottaging listings. Read a discussion of MSM versus gay men in relation to sexual transmission risk in Grov et al. 2007.

⁴ The discussion page for Pleasuredrome sauna on www.squirt.org lists complaints about the time taken to renovate the video screen room.

⁵ A personal conversation with Glasgow-based architect Jude Barber in April 2014.

PART TWO

5
The Making of Alien Sex Club

Alien Sex Club uses my own artistic practice to create artworks in a diverse range of media and processes. These artworks were incorporated into an installation in Ambika P3, part of the University of Westminster in London in July-August 2015 that was open to the public. The installation took the form of a cruise maze in which viewers could choose their own path and explore the exhibition. The maze-like plan was designed to curate the variform artworks and organise them within an architectural narrative that addressed cruising and HIV transmission risk. The installation included live elements that animated static objects and provided audiences with the opportunity to discuss and debate their visit and the contents of the installation. In this chapter I discuss the methodological framework within which the installation was conceived as well as the material processes, techniques, collaborations and broader practical concerns by which the exhibition was realised. It is meant as a critical commentary to the documentation of the installation that appears in chapter 6. My approach to using my practice within the PhD is not to research my own creative process but rather to apply that process to create works addressing HIV and test their effectiveness by analysing audience responses to the installation. ASC is thus an installation within which the Maximalist representation of HIV can be tested for its effectiveness.

5.1 Methodology - Autoethnographic Painting

Autoethnographic painting is painting that draws on the personal experience of the artist. Autoethnography is a relatively new and emerging field. It is a hybrid that lies somewhere between autobiography, story telling and research and seeks to use personal narratives as the basis for making more general pronouncements on a given subject. Spry has described it as a “critical self-reflective discourse” (2001, p706) and “a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” (2001, p710). Within ASC this involves using my personal experience of cruising and HIV transmission risk and combining them with reading on the subject in order to invent fictional accounts that can combine multiple sources into original narratives. This might mean

changing the tense from the first person to the third person as in “He is suffering because he has burned out the dopamine receptors in his brain” (Volume 2, fig.82, p95), which transposes a personal account about an addiction to masturbation onto an unnamed fictional character. I did not want to make an installation that was overtly personal in the way that some work addressing HIV has been in the past in the work of artists including Franko B. i.e. I am not HIV positive; this distinguishes what I may have to say on the subject from others who have contributed to the discourse so far including David Wojnarowicz and Felix Gonzalez-Torres. This position may also allow me to speak to an audience in a fresh way about the subject as well as extending the existing audience for the subject. Autoethnography emphasises the importance of the voice in making a statement, echoing Foucault’s observations of the role the individual voice plays within discourse:

Even if a sentence is composed of the same words, bears exactly the same meaning, and preserves the same syntactical and semantic identity, it does not constitute the same statement if it is spoken by someone in the course of conversation, or printed in a novel; if it was written one day centuries ago, and if it now reappears in an oral formulation. The coordinates and the material status of the statement are part of its intrinsic characteristics (Foucault, 1989, p133).

ASC takes this definition as an instruction manual for voicing statements about HIV in a range of materials and processes with the aim that through this redistribution of statements in a range of different material voices the installation might re-map the coordinates of the existing representation of HIV—restaging and reframing the discussion of the subject for audiences.

Documentation of the exhibition shows large paintings on canvas made by hand using acrylic paint, hung beside digitally printed canvases, sculptures, 3D prints, fabric works, patterned wallpapers, videos, framed drawings, neon signs and performances (fig.92). Each different medium transposes my voice into material form in a slightly different way, the effect of which leads to a multiplication of voices from a single source. Working in different media becomes a kind of method acting for me in which each medium can generate the voice of a different character within the installation.



Fig.92. Walter, John (2015). *The Chem Jester in Alien Sex Club* [Installation, dimensions variable]. Ambika P3 London.

In ASC the self is shown as polyvocal (Bakhtin, 1984) not singular. I employed Bakhtian observations about how voices and tenses operate within the novel and transposed them within visual processes. Further voices were added to the installation by the presence of performers wearing my costumes and adding their authorship. ASC employed the illusion of multiple voices in order to multiply the number of angles from which the HIV subject could be addressed not in order to undermine my authorship as the artist who made it. The polyvocal qualities at work within ASC were partly achieved by employing different types of mark making as a method for indexing different voices. The handmade mark can be seen as the traditional index of authorship within painting, carrying with it distortions personal to the author. As Rosenberg puts it “A painting that is an act is inseparable from the biography of the artist” (Rosenberg, 1959, p27). These distortions are considered to contain the thoughts and feelings of the author in certain painting discourse (Baum, 2014, no page number). An example of this would be the double page from the “Large

Book of Paintings” (Volume 2, fig.264, p194), which features cross-hatched drawing with a paint pen, flat shapes of colour applied with a brush, an iridescent passage of maroon-coloured textured paint, scissor-cut glitter-fabric and a range of collaged translucent prints that are hand-drawn in the computer and glued down. These five different materials and processes provide different visual qualities and different distortions. One of a series of twenty paintings I made as screens to hang within the installation, “Red Maze” (fig.93) combines several different painting techniques that begin to suggest gestures made by different authors; the fluorescent red ground is scumbled¹ on with a large brush to leave marks showing; an architectural project based on a labyrinth by Arakawa and Gins, “Inflected Arcade House” (1989), is painted in the centre of the canvas in thin, strongly pigmented acrylic ink; to the left a series of shapes have been traced from cardboard stencils and painted in create crisp, opaque layers of pastel green; below the maze is a grid of cross-hatched lines made using a paint pen; finally, on the right a series of shapes based on the Benetton logo have been created using masking tape and layers of opaque acrylic. The juxtaposition of these elements and the play between them is part of what gives the painting its sense of having been multiply authored.



Fig.93. Walter, John (2015). *Red Maze* [Acrylic, ink and paint pen on canvas with metal eyelets, 213 x 400cm]. Collection of the artist, London.

The rhetoric of the mark as a sign of authorship is well demonstrated by British painter Howard Hodgkin, whose work is characterised by a use of hot colour, expressive brushwork and enigmatic titles. It is also visually luscious both in terms of the colour and rich texture - his works are characterful and idiosyncratic. Finding meaning in Hodgkin's work depends on a reading of the mark making he employs as an index of his emotion, otherwise it might be seen as purely decorative. The discourse around Hodgkin's paintings focuses on his drive to relive his experiences by painting them - capturing his emotions in paint (Marr, 2014). Works such as "When did we go to Morocco?" address places he has been or experiences that he has had (fig.94). Hodgkin paints representations of his interior world in the Romantic tradition, narratives that are neither strictly figurative nor abstract; rather, I would suggest, they encapsulate autoethnography in the way that they prioritise the personal. As Reed-Danahay observes "the authenticity of an autoethnographic voice is as unreliable as any other" (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p139). As an autoethnographic painter Hodgkin's work is highly subjective. Hodgkin's embodies Bakhtin's image of the "interior subjective man with his depth, complexity and inexhaustible resources" (1981, p44); Hodgkin is the chronicler of his own interior world. His paintings do not depict the inside of the body but the inside of the mind of their author negotiated through a series of painted signs. His paintings are messy in a physical sense - they display impasto surfaces, pentimenti² and exaggerated colour schemes - but they are also messy in a conceptual sense - addressing the elusive subject of his own memory. Spry suggests that such messiness is a classic tenet of autoethnographic work (2001, p727) Hodgkin's process of resurrecting emotional memories in painted form is staged through a self-conscious deployment and discovery of painted marks. Hodgkin's attempts to conjure up a memory can take a long time - in the case of "When did we go to Morocco?" he spent five years (from 1988-1993) experimenting with marks and redeploying them in new positions and new compositions until they evoke the memory he is after. The mark for Hodgkin becomes the retrieval device for memory as the trowel becomes the excavation tool of the archaeologist. Ellis observes that this is a key component for the autoethnographer:

Memory doesn't work in a linear way, nor does life for that matter. Instead, thoughts and feelings circle around us; flash back, the forward; the topical is interwoven with the chronological; thoughts and feelings merge, drop from our grasp, then reappear in another context. In real life we don't always know when we know something. Events from the past are always interpreted from our current position. Yet, that doesn't mean there's no value in trying to disentangle now from then, as long as you realize it's not a project you'll ever complete or 'get right'; instead, you strive, as Richardson says, to get contoured and nuanced in a meaningful way (Ellis, 1999, p675).

This description of memory is reminiscent of the earlier description of the voice within discourse that Foucault describes. The voice is a rhetorical device that persuades the viewer that what is being spoken is genuine.

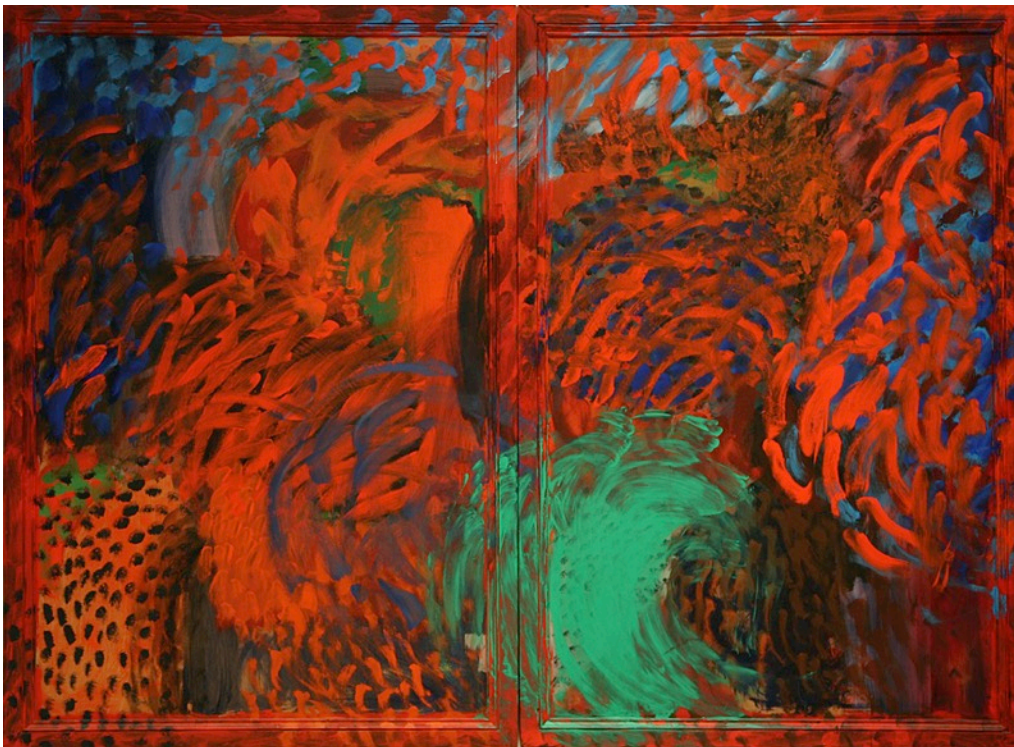


Fig.94. Hodgkin, Howard (1988-93) *When did we go to Morocco?* [Oil on wood, two panels, 196.9 x 134.6 cm]. Metropolitan Museum, New York.

In order to transform my personal experience into pictorial fiction I have drawn on the voices of others to produce hybrid narratives. The level of juxtaposition between visual registers, styles and voices fluctuates throughout ASC where at points elements are more homogeneous and at others more heterogeneous than

others. My approach to the layering and collision of images and styles draws on the work of David Salle, who relies on superimposition, collage, quotation and transparency to achieve polyvocality in his paintings. Halberstam gives a queer reading of collage that has bearing on my deployment of multiple voices within ASC:

Collage precisely references the spaces in between and refuses to respect the boundaries that usually delineate self from other, art object from museum and the copy from the original (Halberstam, 2011, p136).

Collage allows other voices, other textures, other images and other statements to enter an artist's work and thus enter the discourse. In Salle's "Helena and 5 A.M." (fig.95), a large canvas has a narrower one pressed up against the right-hand-side; two small paintings are inserted into the larger canvas, one a still life and the other a pornographic image painted in grisaille; a conch shell, an African statue, a bird, a rose, a handkerchief and a range of photographic and Mange sources are distorted in Photoshop using the twirl function and distributed across the surface; a more painterly and washed-out ground allows these images to float on the surface depicting some kind of architecture probably based on an illustration. The effect of Salle's painting is like being in a floatation tank. His works exemplifies what Bakhtin calls "one of the most fundamental tendencies of the grotesque [body] is to show two bodies in one" (1981, p26), inserting canvases inside each other and pairing them beside each other to form hybrids. Salle's non-linear narrative paintings are eclectic gatherings of voices. Like Hodgkin, the narrative in Salle's painting is not and can be determined by the viewer through a reading of the distinct parts of the painting against each other. Salle's visual syntax uses certain images, such as the gloved hand, repeatedly in different contexts to develop different meanings each time. So too in ASC I have used the repetition and redeployment of certain images across different contexts and rendered in different media to change and question the meaning. In a talk about painting at the ICA in London in 2011 painter David Salle argued for the pictorial as a way of organising imagery and space that grows out of painting but is not exclusive to the material properties of paint. He cites video artist Ryan Trecartin (born 1981, USA) as an artist working in a pictorial way without paint

(Salle, 2011). Trecartin's approach to video is painterly in the sense that Bruce Nauman's approach to video is sculptural i.e. video is a medium that is responsive to traditions that preceded it materially. Trecartin not only draws on the history and compositional conventions of painting to inform his videos but also demonstrates an autoethnographic approach to his own work; he often stars alongside his friends in narratives that use audio effects to transform actors voices and use costume and makeup in order to heighten domestic scenes into pseudo sci-fi psycho dramas (fig.96). This conception of painting is one model for how ASC transposes a painting methodology to a range of non-painting media.



Fig.95. Salle, David (2006). *Helena at 5 A.M.* [Oil on linen, 243.8 x 345.4 cm]. Available from <http://www.davidsallestudio.net/plateA05.112.html> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.96. Trecartin, Ryan (2009-10). *The Re'Search* [Video still].

The multiplication of voices within ASC may be closer to Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia (1981, p11) in the novel. Heteroglossia is a narrative device of double voicing or speaking in another's voice that enables the speaker to distance him or herself from the speech, described by Bakhtin as "*another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way" [author's emphasis] (Bakhtin, 1981, p324). ASC incorporates and goes beyond the pastiche of David Salle to use double voicing in other ways. In the twin videos "Goatguy" and "Bummy Pete" that play within a mock-up of an adult bookstore a puppet and a computer generated head shout a mangled version of Polari at each other. As Paul Baker has observed Polari is a form of double voicing in which the gay man can "say what would commonly be unsayable" (Baker, 2002, p82). The same is true in ASC as the characters in my videos quote sections of personal conversations gathered from my online chats, combined with words found in a Polari dictionary and invented sections to produce an autoethnographic account of cruising online. The videos explore the role that language can play in inventing self, online, as well as the role that slang can play in transmission risk.



Fig.97. Walter, John (2014-15). *Large Book of Paintings* [Artist's book of paintings, mixed media on paper, opens to 122 x 156cm]. Collection of the artist, London.

The dilemma in this process of working with many voices is that it can become very complicated - juggling many parts, ideas and strategies simultaneously and trying to get them to fit together visually. In my large book of paintings (fig.97) I practised working with a range of images that included portraits of well-known celebrities, slogans from my earlier research and architectural plans of gay bathhouses. The double page "Large Book of Paintings" (Volume 2, fig.258, p191) quotes an Archigram project "Sin Centre" (1962) of the same name; the sibilance of the phrase appealed to me, and suggested a place something like what I wanted ASC to be - seedy but celebratory. The visual field comprises drawing, painting, digital print and collage. Pasticheing existing works from the discourse of architecture and art are ways of anchoring ASC for the viewer and giving them visual and conceptual hooks upon which to narrate their way through the installation. For example, in the series of digitally printed paintings "Pill Burden" (Volume 2, figs.195-205, pp153-163), a reworking of Caravaggio's "Self Portrait with a basket of fruit" (Galleria Borghese, 1593) becomes the leitmotif for my

own intertextual statements regarding antiretroviral therapy. The challenge in working with these sources simultaneously was to develop some sort of syntax that would allow the visual field to mesh whilst prevent it from totally homogenising i.e. there would be areas of tension and areas of merging.

5.2 Imagery

Certain images recur throughout the installation and are repeated or transposed between media as a way of conjoining parts of the exhibition. This visual syntax helps generate meaning between artworks that address different aspects of the HIV problem; repeated images suggest conceptual hinges between diverse parts. Alien Sex Club is made up of several hundred individual artworks. These include drawings, paintings, digital prints, 3D prints, sculptures, costumes, videos, songs, wallpapers, tarot cards, carpets, neon lights, an inflatable and artist's books. I have arranged documentation of the work in chapter six in chronological order of making to enable an insight into my process of thought and making. Over the three years in which work for the installation was made I went through a number of different phases in which images were tried and tested in different combinations and material guises for their appropriateness to address the subject. The installation is the presentation and organised display of these experiments. During production of the exhibition an imagery particular to ASC accrued. The tarot set that was used in the fortune telling performances, and displayed as a series of oversized cards within the installation, is the most abbreviated form of what might be referred to as the ASC lexicon.

My research into developing the imagery for the installation began with a series of text pieces; lists of words gathered as notes and then formalised into two PowerPoint presentations that were later projected within the installation. These text projections appropriate words from my research and gather them together; as a list, in the case of "LIMBO" (Volume 2, fig.477, DVD) or hybridised into new phrases, in the case of "Phlegm Jester" (Volume 2, fig.478, DVD). They

combine reading on art with reading on biomedical science, architecture, performance, anthropology, social science and philosophy. Verbal and visual constructs from these disciplines are translated into art within ASC. In my song “Vault” (Volume 2, fig.460, CD), which refers to the London sex club Vault 139 I misquote the phrase “ribs in stone” (Giedion, 1977, p126) which comes from Sigfried Giedion in his discussion of Gothic architecture. The metaphor conjures an image of the body as architecture that I have provocatively re-contextualised within the context of cruising and sexuality. I use this as an example of the way in which the artworks that make up ASC build meanings between disciplines, existing artworks made by others and by using poetic techniques. My artistic practice frequently employs verbal-visual games that are in the tradition of Jasper Johns (Willette, 2012) or Rene Magritte (Cumming, 2011) such as punning, rhyme and absurd constructions in order to create novel arrangements that are engaging for audiences. A good example of this is the character Semen Demon who occurs in several forms including as a 3D print (fig.98), animated in the video “Strategic Positioning” (Volume 2, fig.480, DVD), as a song, a tarot card and in written form:

Semen Demon
That’s my screen-name
Mental Hygiene
That’s on my list of things to do (Volume 2, p269).

The phrase Semen Demon was taken from the screen name of a man that I cruised online once and was impressed by the rhyme and humour of it. The “Semen Demon” (Volume 2, fig.422, p249) that I created is an ominous figure that draws on the physiognomy of the monster in the films “Predator” (1987), his mouth a kind of vaginal opening and overall a kind of skull-like quality. It is in this sense that images in ASC are compounded with meanings through the compression of conceptual layers, associations and material transformations.

Early drawings such as “A Conversion Party” (fig.99) bring statements from sexual health within art. Conversion parties tap into the mythology of the giftgiver and the bugchaser that I have explored in the chapter on the science of HIV in which individuals may seek to give or acquire the virus (MacKenzie-Sempill, 2014). Despite the controversial or disputed nature of this phenomenon I found the language and mythology of sero-conversion rich in imagery and ideas that I could use within ASC. In “He washes himself clean before seroconverting” (Volume 2, fig.91, p100) a man is shown to be performing an invented ritual in which he will transfer from HIV negative to HIV positive. This drawing hybridises Victor Turner’s (1969) accounts of rituals of transformation with my own experience of sexual risks and the fear surrounding HIV. I am interested in the bugchaser / giftgiver binary not because I want to contract the virus but because it describes in a poetic way a psychological state that I feel, and which other gay men may feel, that HIV is my worst fear and that getting it and treating it might be more empowering than worrying about it. This is convoluted thinking and it would not be better from a health perspective to be on HIV drugs. However, by appropriating the language of serosorting into ASC I attempt to open up the complex moral positions involved in HIV for discussion. Drawings like ‘A Conversion Party’ are aides-memoires for me in thinking about HIV in a holistic way. They are cartoons, diagrams, quick visual notes that could lead to making more developed performances, videos or paintings. This approach to drawing as a provisional device is recurrent within ASC.

The imagery for ASC is consolidated within the tarot set. This box of 78 playing cards contains four suits (the lower arcana) and a set of 22 picture cards (the higher arcana) emulating the traditional structure of the tarot. In the ASC tarot the traditional suits (pentacles, wands, swords and cups) are replaced by my own mythological construction: Giftgivers, Bugchasers, Barebackers and Serosorters, which are displayed on the exterior of the tarot card box (fig.100). This is meant to be provocative. For much of the audience this language will be foreign, and for some of the gay male audience it will be too. However, for others it will resonate as dark and funny and for the others learning about these words

opens up a new range of possibilities for thinking about HIV risk and discussing it. I chose the symbols for the four suits carefully – the bugchaser is a bug symbolising a virus and the Serosorter is a double axe symbolising choice between risk and safety. For the Barebacker there was no obvious image to use but I had a piece of plastic in the studio used to hang shoes on a rack in Primark, which when upturned looked like a dog or a figure, which I repurposed. Finally for the Giftgiver symbol there is a common symbol, the biohazard, which some HIV positive men have tattooed on them (Anderson-Minshall, 2013). I debated using the biohazard image but it was very aggressive and didn't feel like part of my artistic vocabulary; it jarred against the other three symbols, which couldn't compete with it tonally. I made the decision instead to use the logo from the clothing brand Benetton. It is a kind of double bow and has associations with advertising campaigns from the 1980s, some to do with AIDS, which appealed to me and fit better within the framework of the four symbols. I consider these four symbols to be the extreme points within a mythology of ASC. In fact I had them made as neon lights, which were placed around the installation like co-ordinates on a sexual compass.



Fig.98. Walter, John (2015). *Semen Demon* [3D print, 12 x 12 x 12cm]. The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.



Fig.99. Walter, John (2013). *A Conversion Party* [Ink and watercolour on paper, 30.5 x 45.5cm]. The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.



Fig.100. Walter, John (2015). *Net of the box for the ASC tarot set* [Lithography on dye-cut card, 12 x 3 x 7.5cm]. Collection of the artist, London.

5.3 Architectural Narrative

ASC attempts to show connections between aspects of the HIV problem that may otherwise remain hidden. The installation contains hundreds of objects that use a wide range of colour schemes, patterns and materials. Organising these into a coherent whole becomes a conceptual problem that is addressed using formal means. My artistic work attempts to transpose intellectual problems into formal ones, which can then be solved using purely visual operations. This back and forth between formal and conceptual is a cyclical process of making and reflection. The artist Carroll Dunham approaches painting as a medium through which narratives and concepts can be thought about using visual means (Simonini, 2016). His recent paintings of bathers (fig.101) reconfigure Cézanne's bathers and literalise his dictum that painterly illusions can be constructed from the cone, the sphere and the cylinder. Dunham's paintings are awkward and cartoony and often take years to complete as he moves shapes and colours around until the story coalesces for him. Whilst this approach may seem unrelated to ASC the process by which narrative and conceptual decisions have been translated into visual ones is analogous to my own approach to developing the installation.

As voices and quotations multiply within the installation, the role of spatial design to perform as syntax emerges. Robert Rauschenberg's "The ¼ Mile or 2 Furlong Piece" (fig.102), a twenty-seven-year-in-the-making opus, is an immersive environment, made up of several media including painting and sculpture. It takes the form of a polyptych (or multi-panelled painting) in order to structure a series of visual themes and variations that stretch around the building. I have expounded on this mode of composition within ASC by using 20 analogue canvases, 30 digital canvases and over 100 walls made from cardboard sheet to create a range of different spatial configurations. I made a schematic drawing (fig.103) of the layout that was used during the install period and to ensure that I had made the correct quantity of material for the space. The

organisation of walls in ASC builds on my approach to the imagery for the installation. The four neon signs are deployed against the four walls of the space – orange, blue, green, pink – which triggers a way of colour-coding certain zones of the sex club. The walls, wallpapers and paint colours applied to them, become compositional devices with which I can break up the large expanse of space within Ambika P3 and create smaller enclaves capable of framing particular works for viewers and forming a spatial narrative that guides them through the installation.

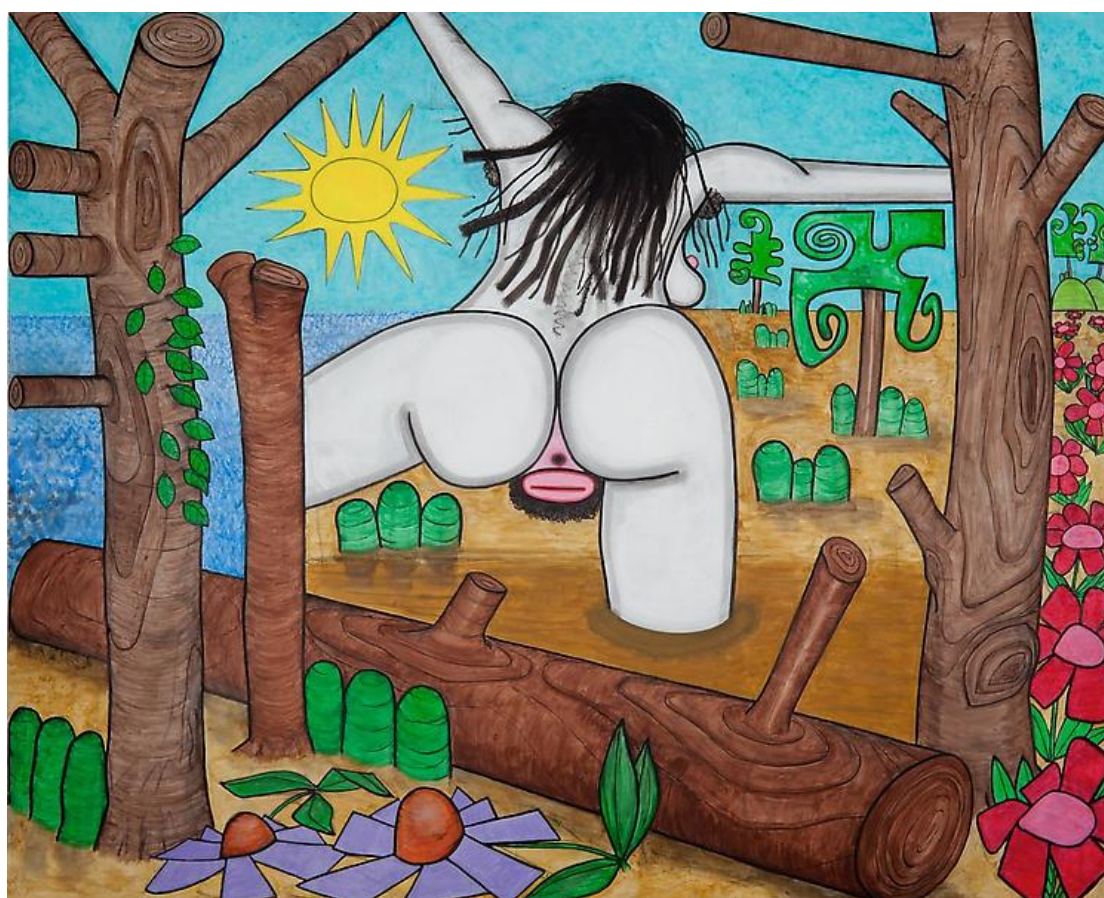


Fig.101. Dunham, Carroll (2006-2012). *Large Bather (quicksand)* [Mixed media on linen 244.5 x 302.3 cm]. Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.

The walls use a 1.8 centimetre thick honeycomb board in 2.4 x 1.2 metre sheets, which were treated with patterns that I designed and had printed on dayglo paper and other designs digitally printed in full colour on billboard blueback paper. These were applied using wallpaper paste, which during drying caused

some of the sheets to bend or buckle. This was often compensated for when the other side of the board was treated. Each board had two slits cut on the bottom edge and rhombus-shaped legs were inserted to enable standing (fig.104). Boards were then cable-tied together to make longer stretched of wall. This was a light and cheap way of working and the material could be recycled afterwards. It became important that there were two opposing wall structures – boards that sat on the floor and didn't touch the ceiling and paintings that hung from the ceiling like sheets and didn't touch the floor. A spatial conversation developed between these two forms, which enticed audiences with glimpses of what was beyond or behind their viewpoint at any given moment.

The spatial design for ASC developed in a highly autoethnographic way that began using word play to develop characters that would inhabit the environment, then to imagine interactions that might happen between them and finally to draw the spaces I imagined such interactions might occur in. In “Juliber, of the house of MacGuffin, is chased through the immunity door by Shitney Cuntstone” (fig. 105) I begin to develop characters that will be made as costumes to feature in ASC as either live or videoed performances. It is also in this drawing that I begin to develop the immunity door - an imaginary structure that could protect you again against HIV if you walk through it's force field. This idea grew out of a lyric in a song that I wrote that ends with the line “it was like a stargate” (Volume 2, p283) a reference to the portal in the science fiction TV series *Stargate SG1* (1994). This proposition eventually developed into the “PrEP curtain” (Volume 2, fig.3, p44) made of organza that all visitors passed through as they walked down the steps into Ambika P3, implying narratively that they had been immunised. Drawing transposes my personal narratives onto invented characters, which are envisioned within Euclidean spaces that inform the architectural narrative and design of the installation. This is a painterly way of approaching the problem rather than an architectural one. One of the formal considerations that I have undertaken is thinking about how architectural and pictorial space can be combined within ASC. Although materially very different to ASC in composing complexity I looked at Mike Kelly and Paul McCarthy's 1997

installation “An Architecture Composed of the Paintings of Richard Powers and Francis Picabia” (Kelley and McCarthy, 1997) in which they construct a kind of maze of walls that are paintings.



Fig.102. Rauschenberg, Robert (1981-2008). *The ¼ Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* [Consists of 195 parts and measures nearly 1,000 feet long]. Installed at Mass MOCA, 2000.

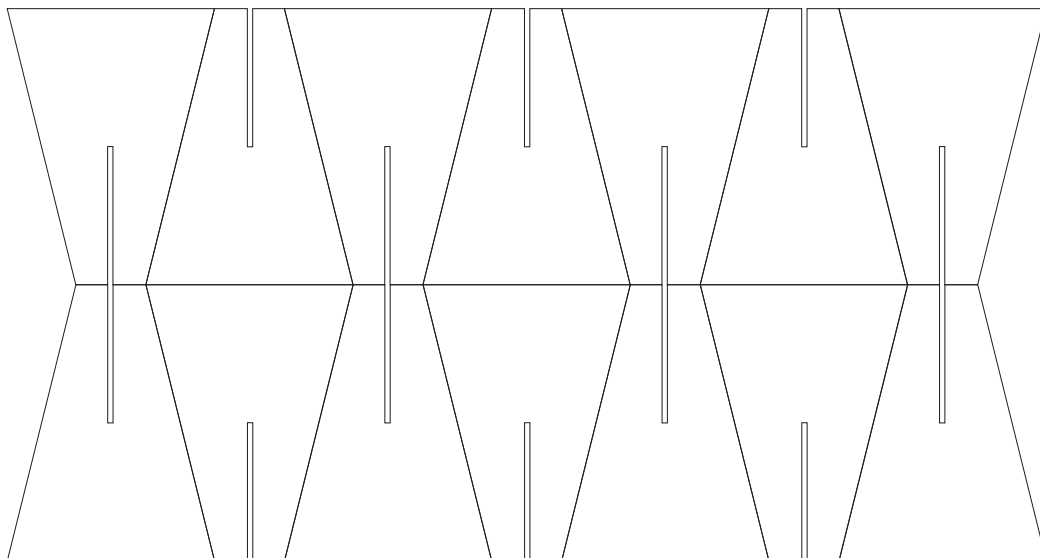


Fig.104. Walter, John (2015). *Drawing for legs to be cut from single sheet of honeycomb board* [Vector drawing]. Collection of the artist, London.

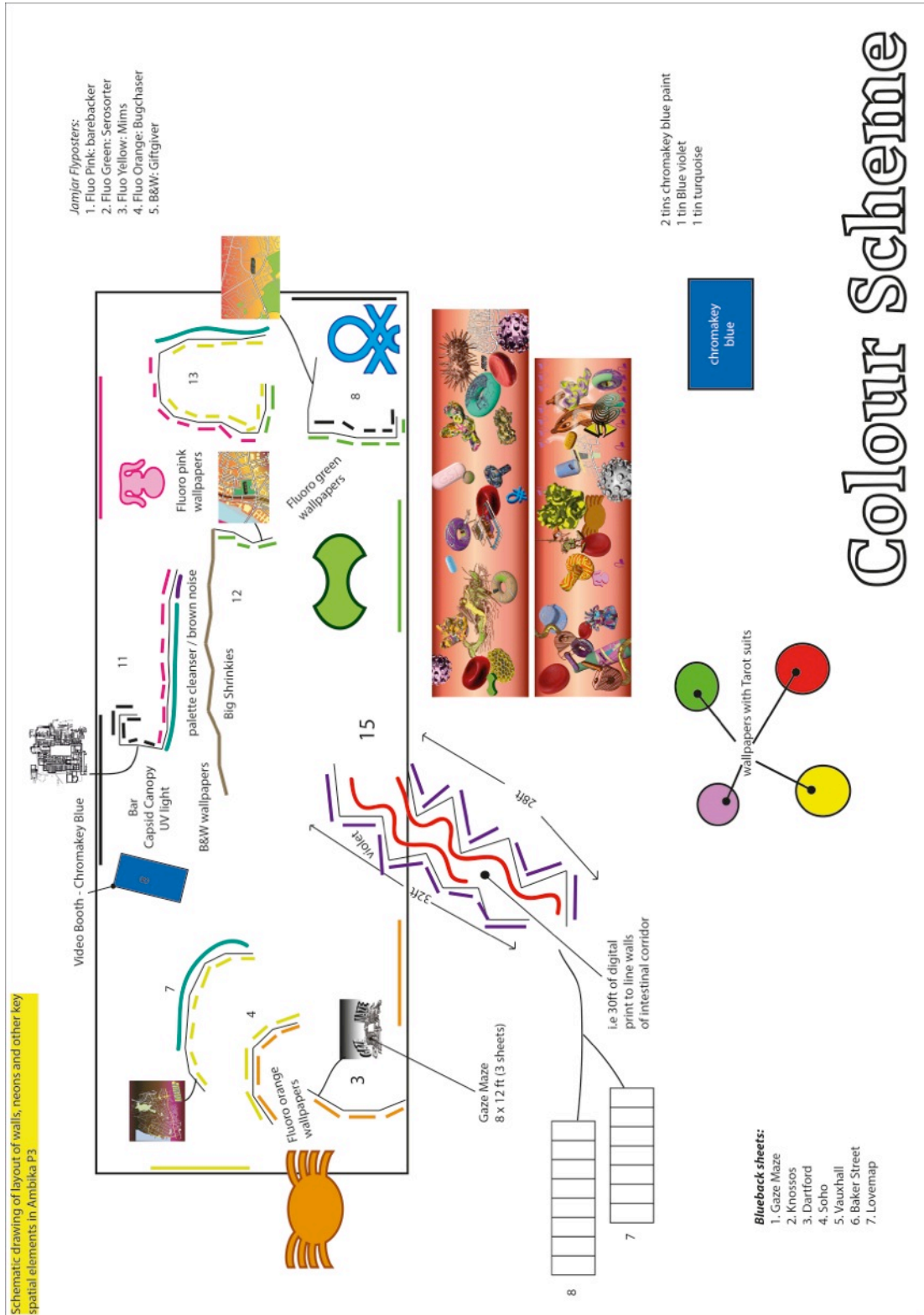


Fig. 103. Walter, John (2014). *Schematic drawing for walls within ASC at Ambika P3* [Digital drawing]. Collection of the artist, London.



Fig.105. Walter, John (2014-15). *Juliber, of the house of MacGuffin, is chased through the immunity door by Shitney Cuntstone* [Ink and watercolour on paper, 45.5 x 61cm]. The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

My approach to the layout and spatial design for the installation was based on my own experience of visiting sex clubs, gay saunas and bathhouses in London. I used the layout of these spaces, especially Vault 139 and Pleasuredrome (fig.106), to begin devising architectural and computer models for how the installation might be organised (figs. 107 and 108). Working with real and virtual models in this way allowed me to eliminate a number of possibilities by testing out ideas and proposing new ones. The digital model lent itself especially to conceiving of what it might feel like to be in the space as I was able to zoom in and render specific viewpoints as I went along. As I have discussed in previous chapters there are specific spatial qualities that characterise sex clubs and gay saunas, especially the idea of the cruise maze. ASC is designed as a cruise maze that includes a long avenue or corridor, rooms, alcoves, hidden passages, a sauna seating area, gloryholes and a bar. The plan for Pleasuredrome shows how on

two floors movement can be created that facilitates the movement of people along a sequence of themed environments. Rather than the atmospheres of heat or humidity that can be found in the bathhouse ASC arranges a sequence of alternating visual themes. Audiences move between paintings, vitrines of objects, walls of framed drawings, a bar performance, a video projection, paintings, a TV monitor and so on. Within ASC there was no single path, but a multiplicity of possible paths. This spatial non-linearity can be seen as an extension of the postmodern painting space that I identified in David Salle's paintings. It became a kind of immersive theatre in which audience members could construct their own journeys within the space, finding narrative conjunctives in the repetition and redeployment of images. The architectural narrative of ASC plays on the idea of the cruise maze by literalising it in a way that in a sex club or bathhouse it can only ever be an allusion to such a form. In this way ASC satirises the cruise maze.

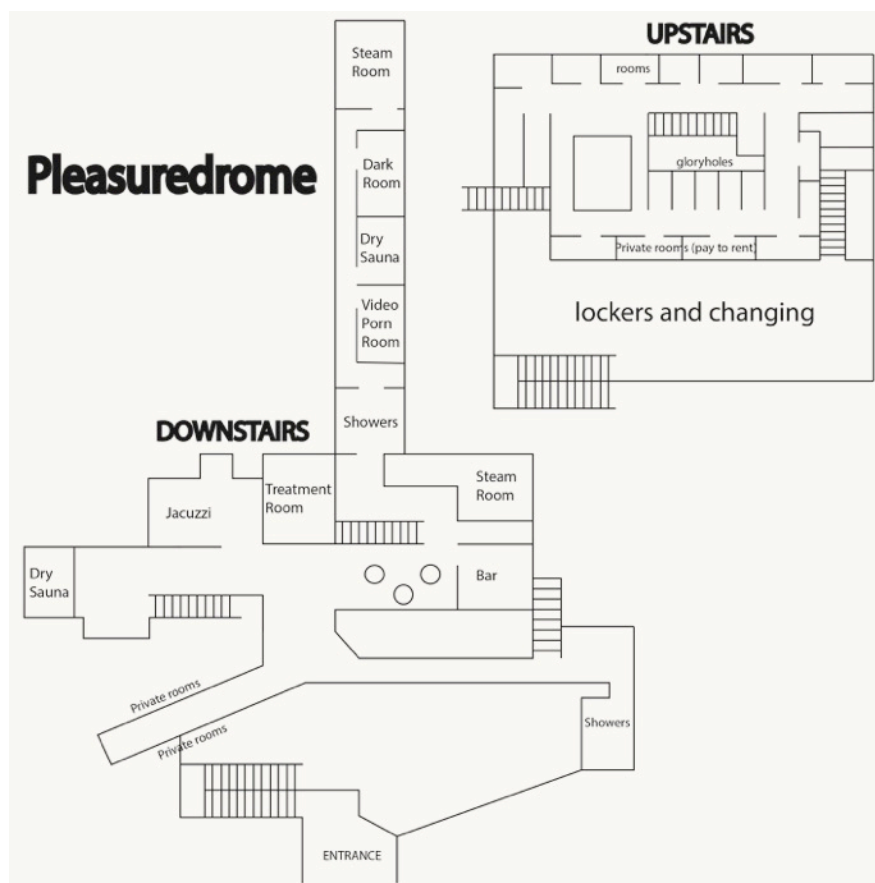


Fig.106. Walter, John (2015). *Plan of Pleasuredrome sauna in London Waterloo* [Digital drawing]. Collection of the artist, London.



Fig. 107. Walter, John (2014). *Architectural model of Alien Sex Club at Ambika P3* [Foamboard, card, organza, digital print, glue, scale 1:50]. Destroyed.

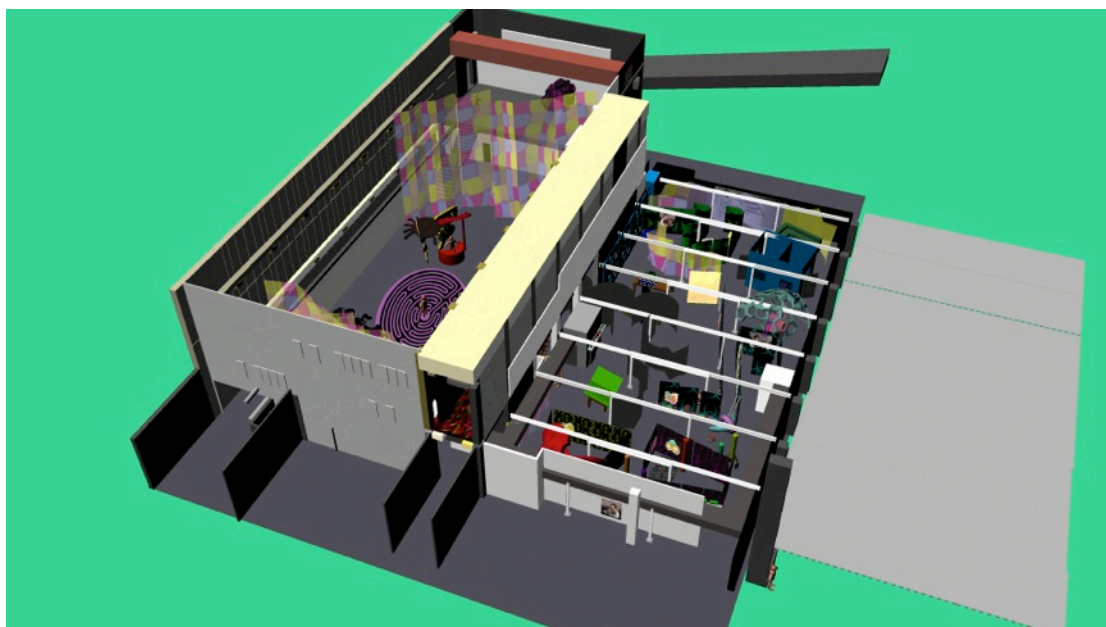


Fig.108. Walter, John (2014-15). *Render of computer model for designing Alien Sex Club installation at Ambika P3 in London* [Autodesk Maya]. Collection of the artist, London.

I used fiction as a method for designing the installation. An early model of the installation (fig.109) takes an illustration from Matthews' book on mazes and labyrinths (1970) and recreates it as a possible plan. This model contains a number of corridors that chicane around corners and double back on themselves like a pinball machine. I have printed miniature wallpapers on dayglo paper that strongly inform the final designs. Translating this layout within the footprint of Ambika P3 was the big challenge for me as a non-architect. My approach to appropriating images is to redraw them in my own hand and I had to invent an equivalent spatial approach. Ultimately this meant working with the layout in the computer for an extended period of time moving parts around, removing some and adding new ones, mostly getting to understand the idiosyncrasies of Ambika P3 and rehearsing the possible moves I could make when I came to install the show. Figure 110 is a screengrab from a computer model seen as a plan and labelled with a number of phrases that I was working with at the time to try and conceive of the installation as a number of different zones: Prostate Palace, Capsid Club, Bugchaser Strasse, Flatpack Forest, Juliberry's Grave, Hall of Maps, Intestinal corridor, Tarot, Porta Magica, Labyrinth and HIV testing. Figure 111 shows a computer model of an imaginary citadel that features buildings and structures that I designed to represent these phrases. I animated the model and used it to narrate a performance and video called "Trance Time" (Volume 2, fig.482, DVD). By going between computer model and floor plan of Ambika P3 I was slowly able to coalesce the imaginary and the real. These phrases are like invisible stitches that dissolve during the process of making the installation but leave a trace in terms of the way that objects, walls and colour schemes are arranged in the final exhibition. In this sense there is a spatial mythology that is bespoke to ASC.

Historical mazes and labyrinths that include the Palace of Knossos in Crete also informed the architectural narrative and imagery of ASC. The architectural plan of Knossos (fig. 112), legendary maze and home of the Minotaur, became an emblem within the installation, as did images such as the labrys, or double axe

(fig.113), that was incorporated into the Serosorter symbol of the tarot and the logo for the whole project. The labrys has previously been used as a symbol of lesbianism but I redeployed it within ASC imagining each blade alternately sorting suitors based on their HIV status. Such symbolism multiplies within the installation. I visited Knossos in 2014 to gather video footage for “Invisible Mazes” (Volume 2, fig. 483, DVD). I also visited a site known as Juliberry’s Grave at Chilham in Kent. It is a Neolithic burial mound upon which people walked to remember the dead (Matthews, 1970, p90). It is closely linked to Julian’s Bower at Alkborough in Lincolnshire, a turf maze carved into the ground that served as a form of entertainment for local villagers. Filming at these sites was incorporated into the videos within ASC and also into the mythology that informed the spatial design; a section of the installation was made up of a series of coffins that co-opted the name Juliberry’s Grave and commemorated some artists that had died earlier in the AIDS crisis such as Keith Haring, Leigh Bowery and the comedian Kenny Everett. The lyrics to a related song that I had written and recorded could be heard playing “we went walking over Juliberry’s Grave / we went dancing on the little labyrinth” (Volume 2, p283). One aspect of the installation dealt with the typological distinction between a maze and a labyrinth. A maze is a multi-pronged path that encourages getting lost whilst a labyrinth is a single path that is designed for meditation. Whilst this was not a key aspect of the final presentation it informed a lot of the thinking behind the narrative and mythology that I invented. I returned to the idea that if the cruise maze was an inherently risk prone space then perhaps the labyrinth was a kind of spatial prophylactic – a sort of architectural version of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis. This distinction between the maze and labyrinth becomes a leitmotif of the installation.



Fig.109. Walter, John (2013-14). *Early architectural model for Alien Sex Club* [Card and digital print]. Destroyed.



Fig.110. Walter, John (2014-15). *Plan of ASC* [Autodesk Maya]. Collection of the artist, London.

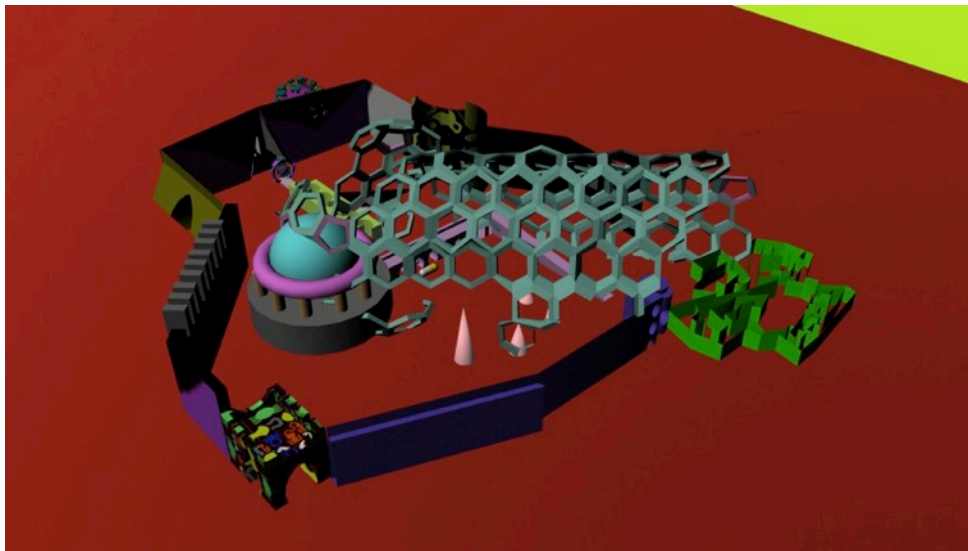


Fig.111. Walter, John (2014). *Computer model of an imaginary ASC citadel used in the video and performance 'Trance Time' and to inform the spatial design of the installation [Autodesk Maya].* Collection of the artist, London.



Fig.112. Walter, John (2014). *Plan of Knossos legendary home of the Minotaur [Computer drawing].* Collection of the artist, London.



Fig.113. Walter, John (2014), *Small gold labrys (double axe) from Knossos*.
Archaeological Museum, Heraklion, Crete.

5.4 Material Processes and Production Values

Making ASC required working with a large array of materials and different techniques. My background as an artist is in painting and drawing but over time I have sought to disable my virtuosity in these media by transposing my critical skills from them to less familiar processes such as computer-aided design. My use of Autodesk Maya is akin to that of an amateur. Artists before me have taken a similar approach in an attempt to retrain their hand and make a different kind of mark, a less controlled gesture or in order to access the subconscious. Willem DeKooning did this by painting with his left hand, the Dadaists did it by making automatic writing and Julian Schnabel did it by painting on uneven surfaces such

as broken plates or velvet. My use of digital media is a way of disrupting my own engagement with the materials and the images I make. There is a level of discomfort present in the process, because of my unfamiliarity with it I am forced to work harder and think on my feet. This makes the process more exciting for me but also helps create a more urgent image that is in turn more engaging for the viewer. Early on in the process of making ASC I took plans of mazes from Matthews' book (1970) (fig.114) and translated them into virtual models in the computer (fig.115). To begin with this activity had no aim other than to translate the source material into my own hand – literally to own the images for myself by redrawing them. This process is true of the way I drew the tarot cards too - working with the Wacom tablet (a graphics tablet that is attached to the computer to allow for hand drawn images made using a stylus) distorts and streamlines my approach to drawing because the process of hand-to-eye-to-image is stretched in space compared to conventional drawing.

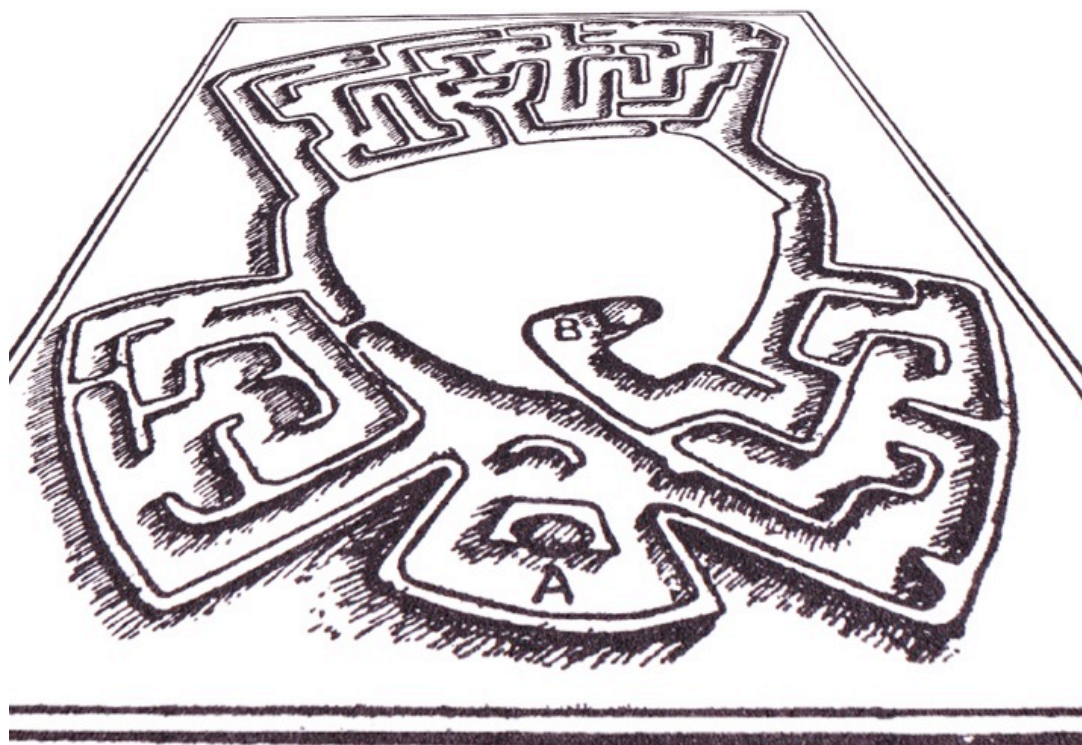


Fig. 114. Matthews, W.H. (1970). *Mazes and Labyrinths. Their History and Development*. New York: Dover Publications, p205.

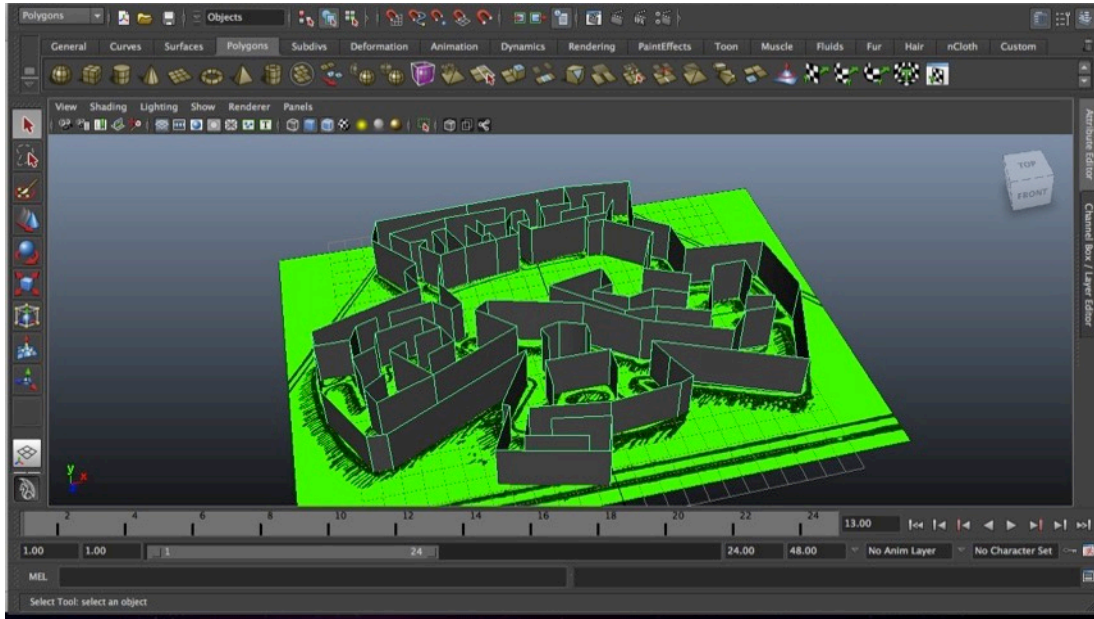


Fig.115. Walter, John (2013-14). *Working model of a maze* [Autodesk Maya].
Collection of the artist, London.

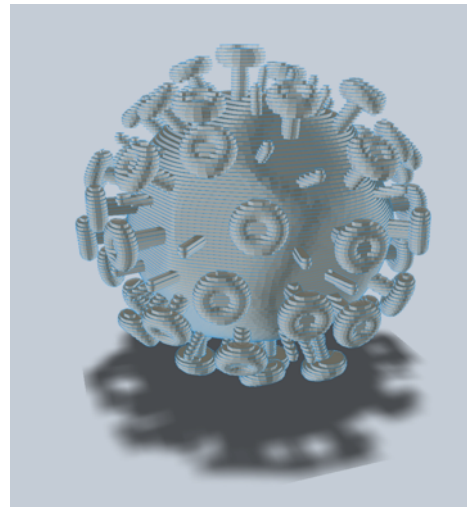
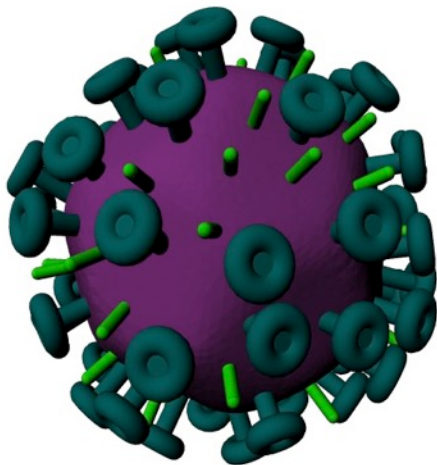


Fig.116 (left). Walter, John (2014). *Model of HIV* [Autodesk Maya]. Collection of the artist, London. Fig.117 (right). Walter, John (2013-15). *Model of HIV* [123D Make]. Collection of the artist, London.

The images that I constructed in Maya were not restricted to spatial designs. I built a number of models of objects that related to the HIV problem such as the viral envelope of HIV (fig.116) and an antiretroviral pill (fig.118), which I was then able to animate and use in videos. Just as with the tarot cards in which I

created a lexicon in two dimensions, here I created a looser lexicon of virtual reality objects, shapes and spaces that could be combined, broken apart and recombined into new formations and new meanings. I also used Maya to animate more organic forms, which I first created in a simpler package called Sculptris. Sculptris allows complex shapes to be assembled quickly by pulling and pushing an imaginary ball of virtual putty around. The activity in Sculptris emulates carving whereas the activity in Maya mimics construction. In Sculptris shapes are found by the removal of material and in the latter shapes are invented by assembling smaller components. I find working in Maya to be a counterintuitive process that involves a lot of time teaching myself the techniques by following YouTube tutorials. However, the results justify the labour: a single virtual model can be given a new colour or texture, placed in a new environment and lit differently multiple times and reused. Figure 118 shows a model made in Sculptris imported to Maya and wrapped in a checkerboard pattern. Figure 120 shows a still from an animation in which a blood platelet has been animated to circle around an obstacle course made of cones wrapped in street maps of cities that I have cruised in. This animation was called “Blood Cones” but was never used in the final installation. It was one of many test pieces that enabled me to learn how to use the software and play with it in order to inform other works.

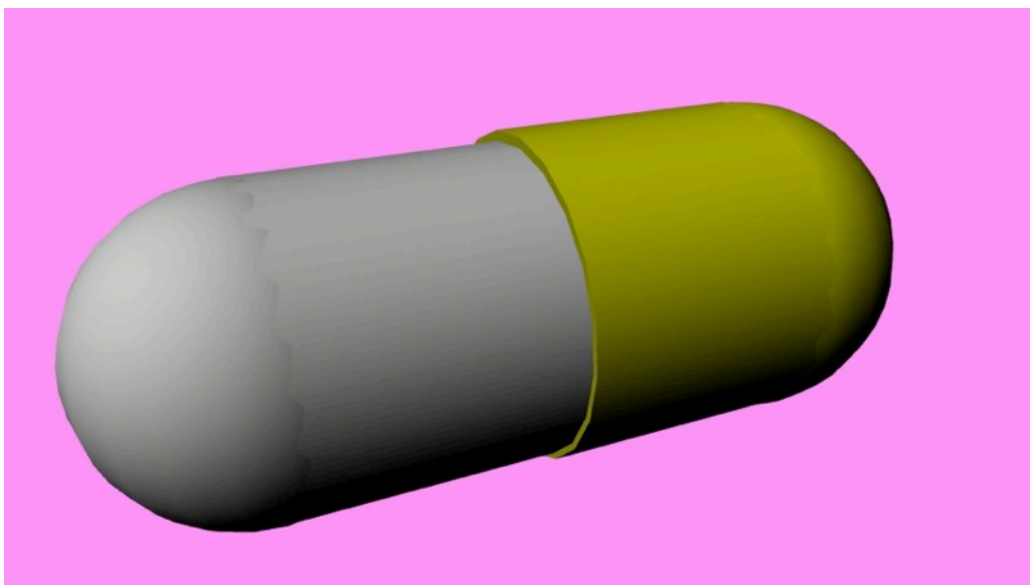


Fig. 118. Walter, John (2014). *Model of an antiretroviral pill* [Autodesk Maya].
Collection of the artist, London.



Fig.119. Walter, John (2014). *Model of Pugvirus head* [Sculptris and Autodesk Maya]. Collection of the artist, London.

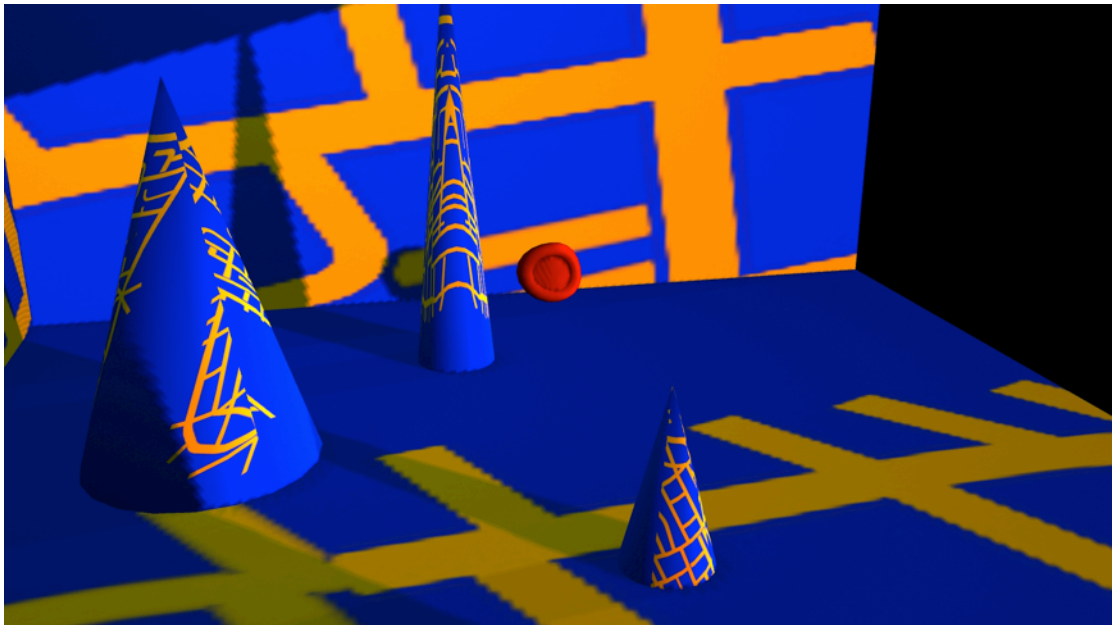


Fig. 120. Walter, John (2014). *Blood Cones* [Autodesk Maya animation still]. Collection of the artist, London.

Transposing images between different computer packages such as Sculptris and Maya is a consistent theme in the making of ASC. In other instances I have taken

images from Maya between Adobe AfterEffects and Adobe Premiere Pro and then back again in order to collage together different types of digital space within video. Certain things can be achieved in one package or medium that cannot in another. I think of this process of transposition and translation as a form of displacement. I use displacement here to describe one set of critical coordinates that are superimposed onto a different problem, environment or medium and then negotiated together towards a formal resolution. Different media are forced into antagonistic positions with each other. This is an attempt to avoid the technology dictating the aesthetic limitations available to me by putting them under the pressure of an alternate set of limitations and thus opening up a hybrid space for invention. This approach is repeated and multiplied within ASC in a range of combinations. This is not the exclusive domain of the digital. In the case of the HIV capsid model (fig.121) I struggled for several months to understand the complex geometry of this shape using both real models and virtual ones. The capsid is an asymmetrical form that has 12 pentagonal shaped proteins (known as pentamers) placed at strategic points that are conjoined by several hundred hexagonal proteins (known as hexamers). In reality each of these hexamers is slightly distorted to compensate for the curvature of the capsid. By working between the real and virtual models and studying videos online I was eventually able to get the shape to come together.

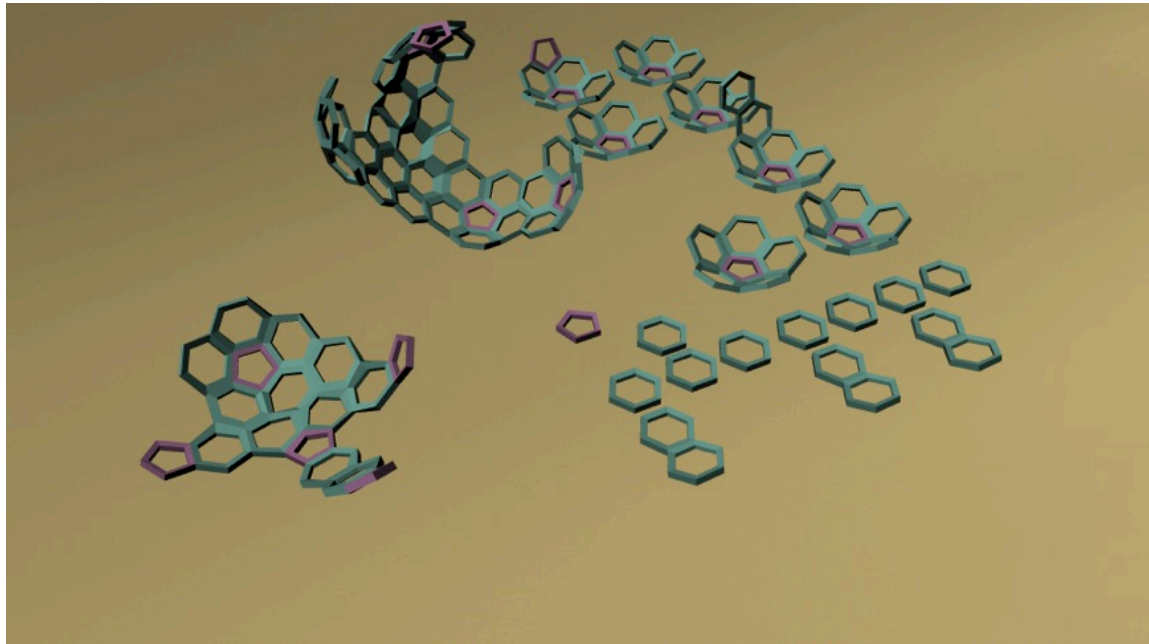


Fig.121. Walter, John (2014-15). *HIV capsid work in progress* - each hexagonal and pentagonal shapes represents a protein [Autodesk Maya]. Collection of the artist, London.

Going between real and virtual processes helped generate a number of happy accidents within ASC. In thinking about taking images out of the computer and realising them in real space I worked with a software package called 123Dmake that enables designs to be cut from sheet material. However, I found it to be more interesting at rendering unusual versions of objects, including my HIV model (fig.117). This sliced version of the HIV looks to me like a glitch or broken version of the virus. Serendipitously I had a series of Sculptris objects 3D printed in plastic and the printer struggled with the HIV model (fig.122) – as if it new it was HIV and was rejected it. The resulting object was slightly burned and had wisps of plastic hanging off it but this added a poetry to the object that I could not have predicted or designed. The mutated 3D printed HIV was exhibited as part of the installation alongside other 3D prints of imaginary viruses that I invented.

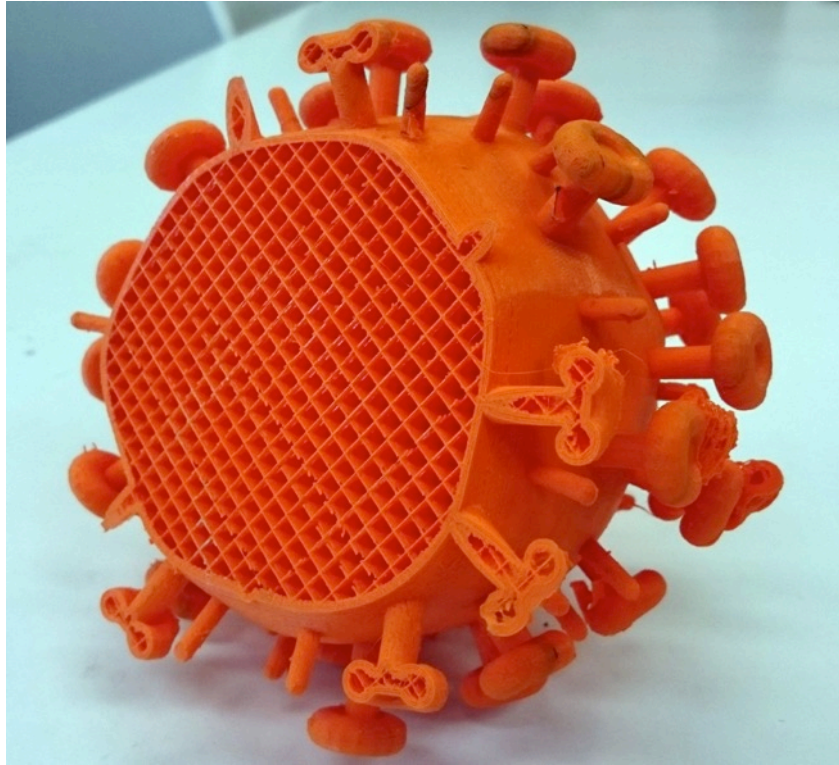


Fig. 122. Walter, John (2015). *HIV* [3D print, 15 x 15 x 15cm]. Collection of the artist, London.

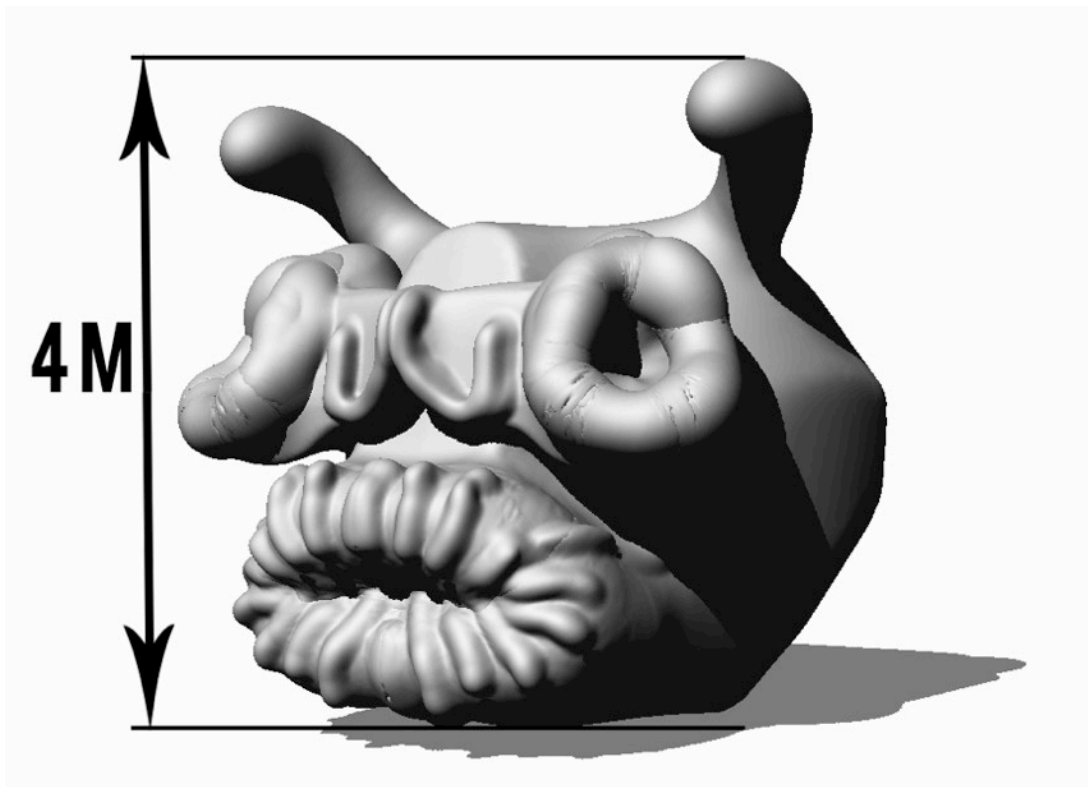


Fig.123. Walter, John (2014). *Working drawing for Pugvirus inflatable* [Sculptris and Photoshop]. Collection of the artist, London.

Other people fabricated two key aspects of ASC. The first of these was a four metre high inflatable version of “Pugvirus” (Volume 2, fig.1, p42) – one of my 3D printed virus heads. The idea to have a large object within Ambika P3 developed while I was working with the computer model and realised that I needed some elements (the curtain was another) that could compete with the scale of the space. The inflatable was a relatively cheap and direct way of solving this formal problem. The narrative impact of “Pugvirus” (Volume 2, fig.1, p42) was to place the audience within the bloodstream, as tiny objects in comparison to the enormous imaginary virus. I employed artist Susie Hunter to make the piece and supplied her with a number of working drawings (fig.123) which she then gradually simplified until she was able to design a pattern from which to cut and sew the sculpture, which is made from pink rip-stop nylon. Working in this way to employ another artist was new to me. I was happy to have others make things for me that I couldn’t have done myself. This was also true of the neon signs that I commissioned. Each of the four symbols representing the suits of my tarot set were translated into neon and encased within clear Perspex (figs. 124 and 125). This provided an elegant formal solution to a problem with lighting the installation that I was struggling with and simultaneously embodied a key conceptual aspect of the project. The inflatable and the neons offer a visual counterpoint to all the objects that I have made. They are slick and have the feel of the Minimalist work that ASC critiques. On a compositional level I think that the installation needed pauses like these. Others included the MDF sauna seating, lectern and shelving that were made during the installation. This was one of the ways that I was able to add other voices within the composition of ASC whilst at the same time preserving my own authorship.

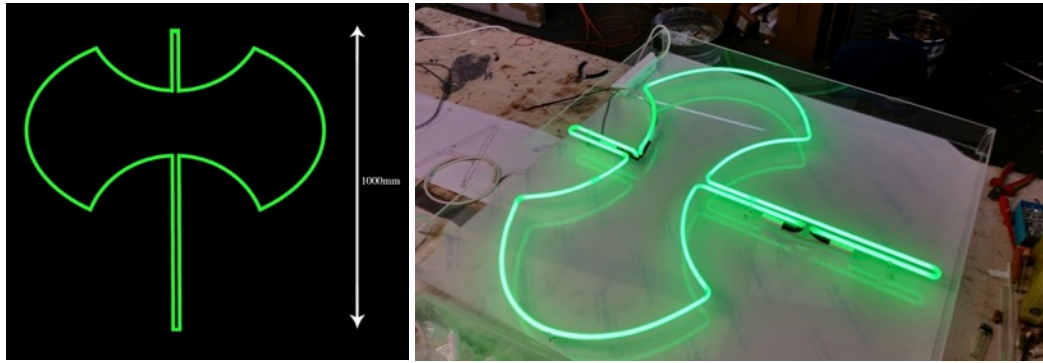


Fig. 124 (left). Walter, John (2014). *Working drawing for serosorter neon* [Digital drawing]. Collection of the artist, London. Fig.125 (right). Walter, John (2013-14). *Neon in progress at Outline workshop* [Neon and Perspex, 100 x 100 x 10cm] Collection of the artist, London.

For the first time within my artistic practice I did not perform within the installation. Instead I hired live artists to wear my costumes and perform as the bar tender (known as the Chem Jester) and the tarot reader (known as Barbara Truvada, fig.126), which I have undertaken in past installations. The presence of performers at all times within ASC had the effect of making the installation into something approaching immersive theatre. I trained each performer to read the tarot and guide them through how I would perform it, then I handed control of the interaction with members of the public over to them. Each performer played the role differently, bringing yet more voices within the installation. The live elements of ASC were a form of co-construction that further dislodged the discourse of HIV in visual art from its existing minimal tendencies. Employing Bakhtian carnivalesque strategies within ASC allowed audiences to engage differently with other elements of the installation. The continuous performances of hospitality and fortune telling were ways of keeping the static elements animated and allowing visitors to have conversations about the exhibition. This removed me from performing the role, which I have done in other projects, but also added new layers of knowledge and interpretation to the installation, bought by each different performer. Interactions with live artists reframed, altered and enriched how visitors read paintings, videos and songs within ASC after their interaction.



Fig.126. Walter, John (2015). *Barbara Truvada at Alien Sex Club* [Costume and tarot reading performance, performed by Harry Clayton-Wright]. The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

5.5 Marketing and Audience Development

ASC attempts to engage new audiences in thinking about HIV / AIDS and the historical and contemporary treatments of this subject by visual culture. A number of practical approaches were taken to building a graphic identity for the

project, which informed the design of printed materials, marketing and the website <http://www.aliensexclub.com>. I was also able to test parts of the installation and develop the vocabulary of audiences about HIV and Maximalism in a number of events and exhibitions leading up to ASC.

I worked with Studio Ponto to develop a graphic identity for ASC that could be used to promote the exhibition, to encapsulate it for audiences and to organise the many visual elements of my practice into a coherent whole on the project website. Studio Ponto are Eurico Sá Fernandes and Mariana Lobão, a young design duo and recent graduates of the London College of Communication (www.ponto.ws). I have worked with graphic designers on previous projects including Two Peacocks (www.twopeacocks.co.uk) and my interest in working with Ponto was to have someone who worked in a completely opposite way to me help frame the Maximalist nature of the installation. The approach to graphic design within ASC draws on strategies developed by General Idea in “IMAGEVIRUS” (General Idea, 1987-1994). There is a logo, a font, a specific colour scheme and graphic identity that are employed across all elements of ASC (fig.127). This graphic identity brands ASC, less to give it financial value (since it is free to attend) and more to give it increased cultural value by distinguishing from other HIV projects and other art installations, thus rendering it identifiable and novel for audiences. My conversations with Ponto during the design process focused around the notion of the cruise maze and how this narrative could be embedded graphically within their design. The logo features a labrys, or double axe, commonly found depicted in Knossos and therefore has connections to the myth of the Minotaur and the labyrinth. I also used the labrys as the symbol for the serosorters suit in the tarot deck. Within ASC the labrys becomes a symbol of duality - positive and negative or risky and safe for example. The website features a version of the logo that is broken in places. When the cursor hovers over the logo it produces a shadow that moves to imply it is three-dimensional. The logo becomes a maze in itself in this context (fig.128). Graphic design is used within ASC to engage people in the ideas and concerns of the project if they are unable to visit the installation in person or to add to their experience of the

project before and after their visit. The website is split in two, like one of my artist's books, and provides audiences with a complete archive of the works in the exhibition as well as further reading about the subject matter of the show and a short introduction to the project. It is a playful space to investigate with many bespoke elements that are designed to translate my aesthetic approach within a graphic one whilst making the project legible to strangers. The collaboration with Ponto is one of translation, clarification and simplification. A handout was produced that was given free to all visitors that featured information about the installation (fig.129) and a glossary of terms relating to the HIV and artistic aspects of the project (fig.130). It was made of an A2 sheet that folded down to A5. This visual dictionary enabled audiences to educate themselves if they chose to.

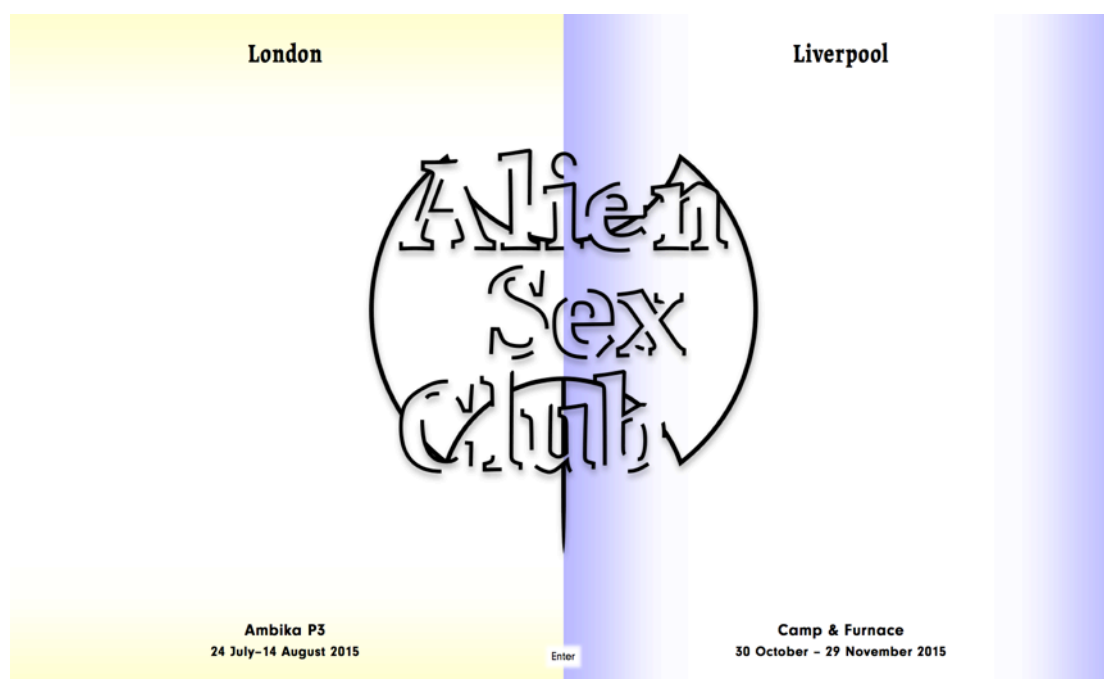
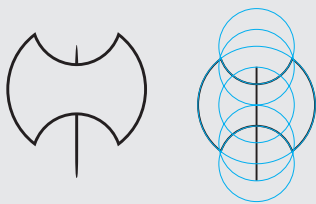


Fig.128. Ponto Studio (2015). *Alien Sex Club website* [Website]. Collection John Walter, London.

Logotype



Monogram construction



Woodmarks



Coloured backgrounds



Typography

ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890!?!@%&()**

Lapture Bold

Primary display typeface, to be used for large type. Features in the logo, and can be used in outlines:

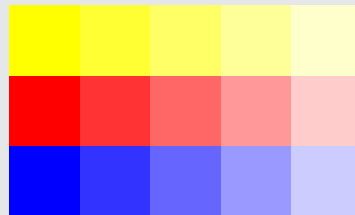
ABCDEFGHIJKLM
NOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
1234567890!?!@%&()**

Neuzeit Grotesk

Secondary typeface, to be used for descriptions and body copy.

Colour Palette

Yellow
H - #ffff00
R255 G255 B0
Red
H - #ff0000
R255 G0 B0
Blue
H - #0000ff
R0 G0 B255



White
H - #ffffff
R255 G255 B255

Black
H - #000000
R0 G0 B0

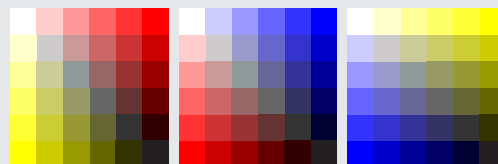
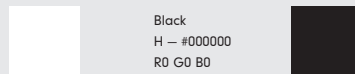


Fig.127. Ponto Studio (2014-15). *Style Sheet by Ponto Studio for graphic identity of Alien Sex Club.* Collection John Walter, London.

The logo was deployed in a number of contexts including on promotional materials such as badges (fig.131), stickers, t-shirts, sew-on patches, flyers and posters. Many people encountered the project before, after and during the exhibition because of this graphic identity. The catchiness and provocative nature of the title drew in audiences and coupled with the striking logo it made the project memorable and talked about (I will address this in detail in the chapter analysing responses to ASC). Social Media accounts for ASC were established on Facebook and Twitter and I used my personal Instagram account to promote the installation and share images of it during the making, installation and exhibition period. The header for the ASC Twitter account featured the logo floating within a range of images from the installation that were bound together in an ethereal coloured fog (fig.132). Adverts were placed in a number of print and online magazines. These included art publications such as Frieze magazine, gay lifestyle magazines such as Attitude magazine, gay scene free newspapers such as Boyz and gay cruising apps such as Grindr. An advert would pop up when people opened their Grindr account within a given distance of Ambika P3 (central London zone 1) which they could click on and link them to the ASC website. The main advert featured me sat amongst a range of elements from the installation, arranged for the photo shoot in my studio (fig.133). I can be seen sitting in one of my papier-mâché coffins wearing an ASC t-shirt reading an Arawaka and Gins book to an imaginary audience surrounded by capsid sculptures, the large tarot deck, a neon in the shape of the Giftgiver symbol, a painting featuring a bathhouse plan and lots of organza from the PrEP curtain. It took half a day to shoot this image with the help of an independent curator and a photographer. The aim was to produce something that would contrast with other adverts in Frieze, which feature cropped artworks or purely text. Showing the artist and making the advert an artwork of sorts made it stand out.

EVENTS

Alien Sex Club is accompanied by a series of events devised by artists in collaboration with HIV scientists. All events are free.

VERA CHOK is an actor, writer and performer. HIV detection, from the frustration and ease surrounding

DR MICHAEL BRADY is the Clinical Lead of the South East London Sexual Health Network and also chairs their Training Partnership.

DAVID STUART is the Substance Use Lead at London's Dean Street (UCL/HIV services), addressing the sexualised drug use behaviours of MSM (men who have sex with men), commonly referred to as 'chemsex'.

THURSDAY 15 AUGUST 4.30-9.30PM

LET'S TALK ABOUT GAY SEX & DRUGS - ALIENS

Let's Talk About Gay Sex & Drugs is an open communication forum for anyone to come and talk about how they perceive sex and drug use within the gay male community of London. No judgement and no villainising drugs for the sake of it, just an open and honest discussion. Everyone who wants to speak gets five minutes and all are welcome.

SUNDAY 25 JULY 8PM

EXHIBITION TOUR
with John Walter and curator Ellen Mara De Wachter

COMING TO MY PARTY...
Jordan McKenzie and Dr Ford Hickson

LOADS OF CHARLIE
Tim Spooner is an artist working in performance, painting and sculpture, considering themes on emotional and molecular levels.

SUNDAY 25 JULY 8PM

LOADS OF CHARLIE
Jordan McKenzie and Dr Ford Hickson

Performed by Heart London Cabaret, this event is based on interviews and articles about chemsex between gay and bisexual men including the fashion designer Alexander McQueen, whose party invites all men chemsex between gay and bisexual men. Jordan McKenzie is a visual and performance artist and lecturer in Fine Art at the University for the Arts London.

DR FORD HICKSON is course director of Public Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

FRIDAY 1 AUGUST 8PM

THINGS ARE TRUE
P3 Jackson, running time 20mins

VERA CHOK and **DR MICHAEL BRADY**

Visual culture and HIV today. It takes the shape of a cruise maze, a spatial form common to sex clubs and gay saunas, to bring together works that address the complex subject of contemporary sexual health.

Alien Sex Club explores the relationship between visual culture and HIV today. It takes the shape of a cruise maze, a spatial form common to sex clubs and gay saunas, to bring together works that address the complex subject of contemporary sexual health.

Alien Sex Club grows out of a collaboration between artist John Walter and Dr Alison Kogler, an HIV specialist and researcher at University College London. The project uses art and architecture to give visual shape to moved online with apps such as Grindr, Grindr and Hornet gaining in popularity. However, many men still want to meet in person and anonymously for sex, despite the risks involved.

You are invited to explore Alien Sex Club. By at the bar, receive free rapid HIV testing and attend our public events devised by the Alien Sex Club team, enjoy hospital.

Gay men remain one of the groups most at risk of HIV in the UK, with 3,250 new cases of the infection diagnosed in this group in 2013. As antiretroviral drugs (ARTs) have become more effective at treating the virus, there has been less talk of HIV (AIDS) in the past. However, there is a concern in the community.

A correlated shift in the perception has also contributed to rise in HIV infections over recent years. Practices such as 'chemsex' and 'partying' are some of the factors contributing to this phenomenon.



Alien Sex Club
by John Walter

Ellen Mara De Wachter, Curator
Penny Andrea, Studio Assistant
Jonathan Bassett, Photographer
Susie Hunter, Fabricator
Studio Ponto, Graphic Design
Antony Parkes, Head Technician

Collaborators
Susannah Hewlett, Artist
Vera Chok, Actor
Mark Scott-Wood, Artist
Jordan McKenzie, Artist
Frances Disney, Artist
Tim Spooner, Artist
Professor Sheena McCormack, UCL
David Stuart, Dean Street Wellbeing
Ford Hickson, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
Dr Michael Brady, Terrence Higgins Trust
Janey Sewell, UCL
Dr Valerie Delpach, Public Health England

Partners
University of Westminster
Ambika P3
Homotopia
Terrence Higgins Trust
Dean Street Wellbeing
Pasanie
MAKE Aberdeen

With thanks to
Ann Bukantas
Gary Everett
Jordan Baseman
Judith Carlton
Professor Lindsay Bremner
Dr Victoria Watson
Dr Francis Ray White
Collis Priest
SMART Consultants Aberdeen
Robin Klassnik and Matt's Gallery
Patricia Fleming
and all those who generously gave to the Alien Sex Club crowdfunding campaign

Funding
Arts & Humanities Research Council
Arts Council England
Wellcome Trust
Alien Sex Club Supporters

Alien Sex Club will travel to Liverpool 30 October-1 December, where it will be part of the Homotopia festival.

JOHN WALTER
24 JULY-14 AUGUST

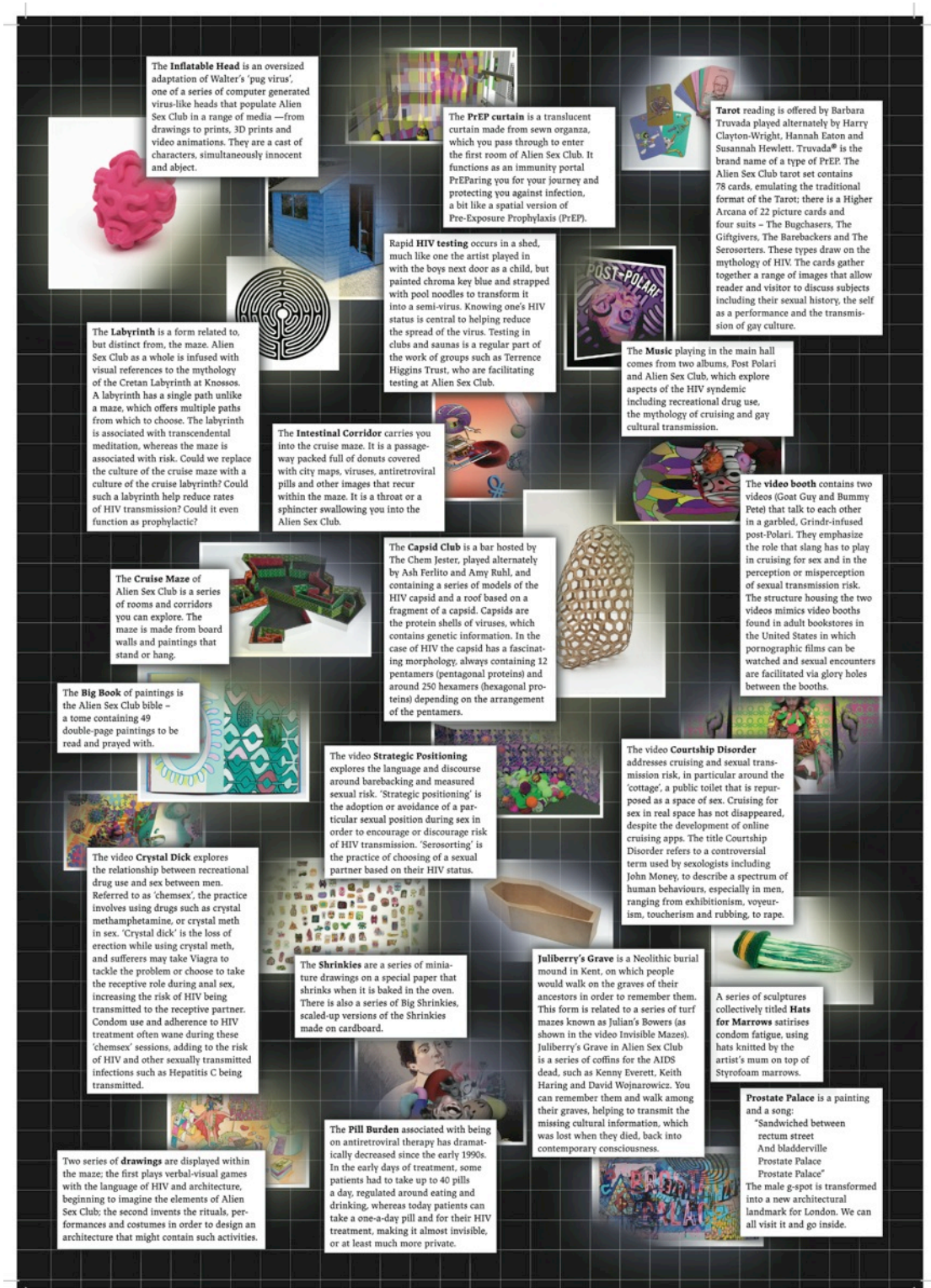
Alien Sex Club

AMERICA 15
35 MARYLEBONE RD LONDON NW1 5LS

OPENING HOURS
WED-FRI 11-7PM
SAT-SUN 12-6PM



Fig.129. Ponto Studio (2015). Side one of folding information sheet [Lithography on paper, 42 x 59.4cm]. Collection John Walter, London.



The **Inflatable Head** is an oversized adaptation of Walter's 'pug virus', one of a series of computer generated virus-like heads that populate Alien Sex Club in a range of media—from drawings to prints, 3D prints and video animations. They are a cast of characters, simultaneously innocent and abject.

The **PrEP curtain** is a translucent curtain made from sewn organza, which you pass through to enter the first room of Alien Sex Club. It functions as an immunity portal PrEParing you for your journey and protecting you against infection, a bit like a spatial version of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

Tarot reading is offered by Barbara Truvada played alternately by Harry Clayton-Wright, Hannah Eaton and Susannah Hewlett. Truvada® is the brand name of a type of PrEP. The Alien Sex Club tarot set contains 78 cards, emulating the traditional format of the Tarot; there is a Higher Arcana of 22 picture cards and four suits - The Bugchasers, The Giftgivers, The Barebackers and The Serosorters. These types draw on the mythology of HIV. The cards gather together a range of images that allow reader and visitor to discuss subjects including their sexual history, the self as a performance and the transmission of gay culture.

Rapid HIV testing occurs in a shed, much like one the artist played in with the boys next door as a child, but painted chroma key blue and strapped with pool noodles to transform it into a semi-virus. Knowing one's HIV status is central to helping reduce the spread of the virus. Testing in clubs and saunas is a regular part of the work of groups such as Terrence Higgins Trust, who are facilitating testing at Alien Sex Club.

The **Music** playing in the main hall comes from two albums, Post Polari and Alien Sex Club, which explore aspects of the HIV sydemc including recreational drug use, the mythology of cruising and gay cultural transmission.

The **Labyrinth** is a form related to, but distinct from, the maze. Alien Sex Club as a whole is infused with visual references to the mythology of the Cretan Labyrinth at Knossos. A labyrinth has a single path unlike a maze, which offers multiple paths from which to choose. The labyrinth is associated with transcendental meditation, whereas the maze is associated with risk. Could we replace the culture of the cruise maze with a culture of the cruise labyrinth? Could such a labyrinth help reduce rates of HIV transmission? Could it even function as prophylactic?

The **Intestinal Corridor** carries you into the cruise maze. It is a passageway packed full of donuts covered with city maps, viruses, antiretroviral pills and other images that recur within the maze. It is a throat or a sphincter swallowing you into the Alien Sex Club.

The **video booth** contains two videos (Goat Guy and Bummy Pete) that talk to each other in a garbled, Grind-infused post-Polari. They emphasize the role that slang has to play in cruising for sex and in the perception or misperception of sexual transmission risk. The structure housing the two videos mimics video booths found in adult bookstores in the United States in which pornographic films can be watched and sexual encounters are facilitated via glory holes between the booths.

The **Cruise Maze** of Alien Sex Club is a series of rooms and corridors you can explore. The maze is made from board walls and paintings that stand or hang.

The **Capsid Club** is a bar hosted by The Chem Jester, played alternately by Ash Ferlito and Amy Ruhl, and containing a series of models of the HIV capsid and a roof based on a fragment of a capsid. Capsids are the protein shells of viruses, which contain genetic information. In the case of HIV the capsid has a fascinating morphology, always containing 12 pentamers (pentagonal proteins) and around 250 hexamers (hexagonal proteins) depending on the arrangement of the pentamers.

The **Big Book** of paintings is the Alien Sex Club bible—a tome containing 49 double-page paintings to be read and prayed with.

The video **Strategic Positioning** explores the language and discourse around barebacking and measured sexual risk. 'Strategic positioning' is the adoption or avoidance of a particular sexual position during sex in order to encourage or discourage risk of HIV transmission. 'Serosorting' is the practice of choosing of a sexual partner based on their HIV status.

The video **Courtship Disorder** addresses cruising and sexual transmission risk, in particular around the 'cottage', a public toilet that is repurposed as a space of sex. Cruising for sex in real space has not disappeared, despite the development of online cruising apps. The title Courtship Disorder refers to a controversial term used by sexologists including John Money, to describe a spectrum of human behaviours, especially in men, ranging from exhibitionism, voyeurism, toucherism and rubbing, to rape.

The video **Crystal Dick** explores the relationship between recreational drug use and sex between men. Referred to as 'chemex', the practice involves using drugs such as crystal methamphetamine, or crystal meth in sex. 'Crystal dick' is the loss of erection while using crystal meth, and sufferers may take Viagra to tackle the problem or choose to take the receptive role during anal sex, increasing the risk of HIV being transmitted to the receptive partner. Condom use and adherence to HIV treatment often wane during these 'chemex' sessions, adding to the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections such as Hepatitis C being transmitted.

The **Shrinkies** are a series of miniature drawings on a special paper that shrinks when it is baked in the oven. There is also a series of Big Shrinkies, scaled-up versions of the Shrinkies made on cardboard.

Juliberry's Grave is a Neolithic burial mound in Kent, on which people would walk on the graves of their ancestors in order to remember them. This form is related to a series of turf mazes known as Julian's Bowers (as shown in the video Invisible Mazes). Juliberry's Grave in Alien Sex Club is a series of coffins for the AIDS dead, such as Kenny Everett, Keith Haring and David Wojnarowicz. You can remember them and walk among their graves, helping to transmit the missing cultural information, which was lost when they died, back into contemporary consciousness.

A series of sculptures collectively titled **Hats for Marrows** satirises condom fatigue, using hats knitted by the artist's mum on top of Styrofoam marrows.

Prostate Palace is a painting and a song: "Sandwiched between rectum street And bladderville Prostate Palace Prostate Palace" The male g-spot is transformed into a new architectural landmark for London. We can all visit it and go inside.

Two series of **drawings** are displayed within the maze; the first plays verbal-visual games with the language of HIV and architecture, beginning to imagine the elements of Alien Sex Club; the second invents the rituals, performances and costumes in order to design an architecture that might contain such activities.

The **Pill Burden** associated with being on antiretroviral therapy has dramatically decreased since the early 1990s. In the early days of treatment, some patients had to take up to 40 pills a day, regulated around eating and drinking, whereas today patients can take a one-a-day pill and for their HIV treatment, making it almost invisible, or at least much more private.

Fig.130. Ponto Studio (2015). *Side two of folding information sheet* [Lithography on paper, 42 x 59.4cm]. Collection John Walter, London.



Fig.131. Studio Ponto (2015). *Alien Sex Club logo on badges* [Each 2cm diameter].
Collection John Walter, London.



Fig.132. Studio Ponto (2015). *Banner from twitter account used to promote Alien Sex Club* [jpeg]. Collection John Walter, London.

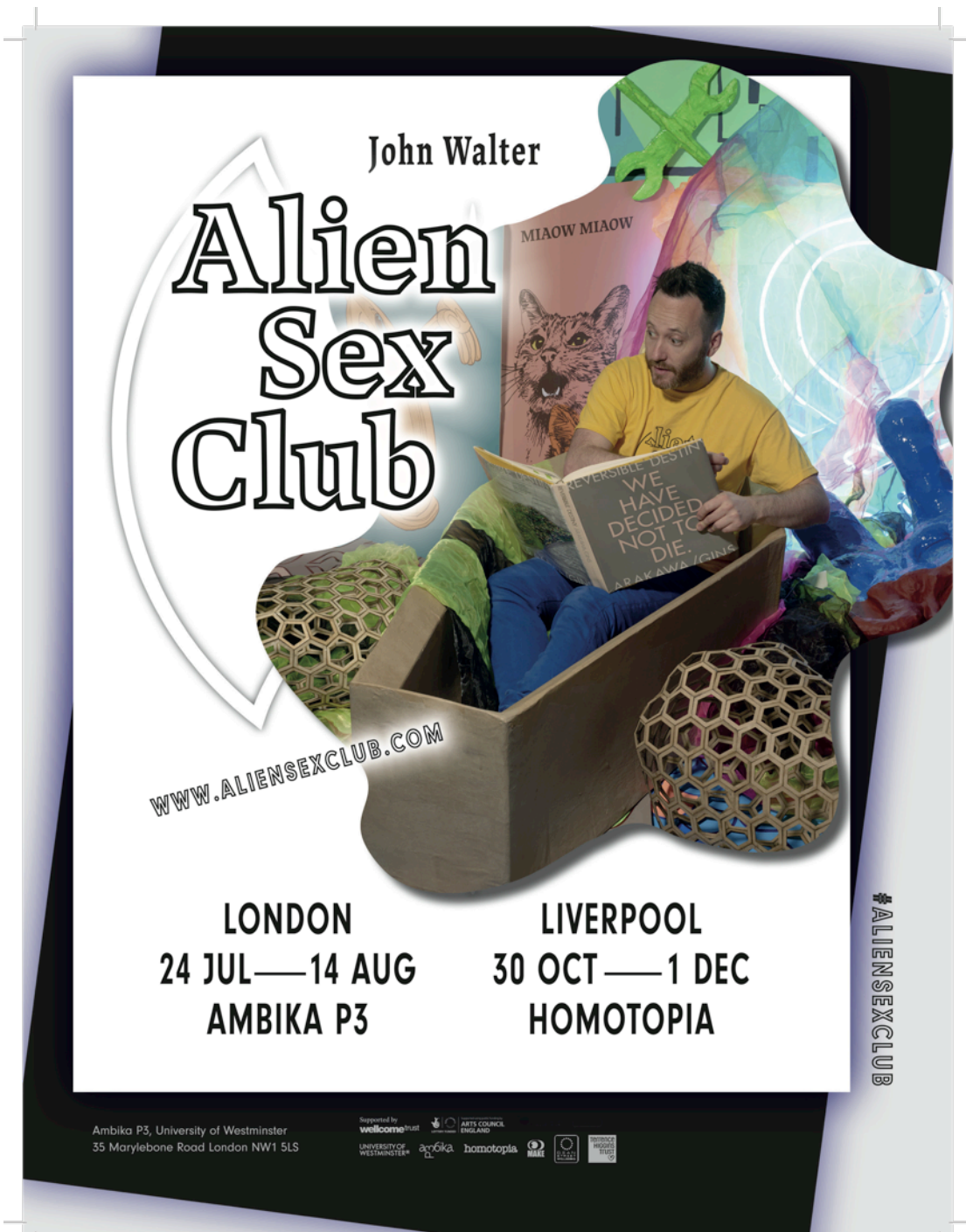


Fig.133. Studio Ponto (2015). *Advert for Alien Sex Club* [Digital image]. Collection John Walter, London.

During the build up to ASC I used a number of opportunities to test parts of the installation, promote the exhibition and help develop the vocabulary of audiences for the project. I used two exhibitions in the run up to ASC as

opportunities to make new work for ASC and test how it could be shown. ‘Turn My Oyster Up’ show at the Whitstable Biennale 2014 (fig.134) and “The Department of Ritual Objects” (2014) part of *Lily & Mim* in Aberdeen (2014, fig.135) featured objects, patterns and videos that would later be exhibited at Ambika P3. Both exhibitions enabled me to build a critical context and vocabulary amongst the art going public for what was to come. In *Turn My Oyster Up* (2014) I showed the videos “Goatguy” and “Bummy Pete” (Volume 2, fig.481, DVD) on monitors within a bar that I ran inside a beach hut. Visitors to the installation were hosted by me and could engage in discussions that frequently addressed the relationship between gay slang and HIV risk. I used “The Department of Ritual Objects” (2014) to test how different artworks could be installed together. The installation featured two carpeted floors made of Astroturf, both black and white – one a maze and the other a labyrinth. I was able to test the effectiveness of metaphors related to the cruise maze and material processes such as floor coverings, which informed my approach to the installation at Ambika P3 both physically and narratively. Many of the visitors to these smaller installations became members of the audience that attended ASC.



Fig.134. Walter, John (2014). *Turn My Oyster Up* [Installation with video, wallpaper, performance and hospitality]. Whitstable Biennale, Kent.



Fig.135. Walter, John (2014). *The Department of Ritual Objects* [mixed media installation, part of Lily & Mim]. School Hill, Aberdeen.

One important event in the build up to ASC was the Pride march in London on Saturday 27th June 2015. I decided that it was important to advertise ASC to gay and queer audiences who may have an interest in HIV and walking in the Pride parade reaches an audience of several thousand. The cost of the Pride march was £50 so it was cheap advertising compared to placing a full-page advert in Frieze, which was £2820 (that includes a 20% discount because a colleague works there). I collaborated with my aunt who is a skilled seamstress, to create a fabric banner that we could march with. The banner, which measures 2 x 3m (Volume 2, fig.445, p264) is made of hessian, glitter fabric, blue-screen fabric and digitally printed canvas, which is hand sewn. Figure 136 shows my instructions for my aunt. Importantly the banner was hand-made. This meant that it stood out against the many corporate floats and slick digitally-printed presentations of other groups marching in the parade such as Google, Terrence Higgins Trust and an array of other groups and businesses that wish to be seen as LGBT friendly.

My aunt made an accompanying coat for her dog that emulated the design of the banner. Our party of around forty people marched from Baker Street to Trafalgar Square and attracted a great deal of attention for ASC. We gave out flyers and stickers along the route.



Fig.136. Walter, John (2015). *Design for Pride banner* [Digital image]. Collection of the artist, London.

Before ASC was installed I commissioned three artists to develop events to be staged within the installation at Ambika P3 in order to engage audiences that may otherwise not attend. I paired artist Tim Spooner with Chemsex / HIV expert David Stuart from sexual health clinic 56 Dean Street in Soho. Tim is a performer with a large audience of his own and David has access to a large audience of gay men. I partnered artist Jordan McKenzie with Dr Ford Hickson from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Ford's research is around recreational drug use and HIV and Jordan is a performance artist whose work addresses queer themes. Finally I commissioned actor Vera Chok to work with Dr Michael Brady from Terrence Higgins Trust. The audience for Vera's work is very different to mine because of her training as an actor and I thought it

would be interesting to see how she would interpret Michael's understanding of HIV, antiretrovirals and PrEP. The events were designed to add new voices to the HIV representation beyond my own.

5.6 Traversing Thresholds

Alien Sex Club was open to the public at Ambika P3 in London from 24th July – 14th August 2015. 1673 visitors attended the exhibition in London over 17 days including attendance at 6 events. ASC involved a wide range of collaborations and partnerships that enabled realisation of the project on the scale intended and in the level of detail required. A range of difficulties was encountered during the making of the installation due to the multidisciplinary nature of the project. A threshold of attitudes surfaced that was evidenced in the response of institutions and individuals. The project exploited ambiguities between these thresholds of value and created new hierarchies capable of serving the needs of the installation. One of the most important collaborations was with Dr Alison Rodger, a clinical epidemiologist and HIV specialist at UCL, with whom I applied to The Wellcome Trust for a Small Arts Award. In this final section of the chapter I will discuss the process by which I negotiated collaborations within ASC from financial, ethical and cultural viewpoints.

ASC was an expensive installation to stage. I worked with a budget of just under £100k to stage ASC in London and then tour it to a venue in Liverpool. The first £6k of this came from a crowd funding campaign that I carried out in 2014. I had never attempted to raise money in this way before. I spoke to a number of colleagues who had funded small projects in this way and sought guidance from them before I embarked on the process. My aim was to raise £10k in 3 months. I used www.sponsume.com to host my campaign since they charged the least fee compared to other companies. I filmed a video, which explained in simple terms what the project was, why I needed the money and how support would be rewarded:

Hello

I'm John Walter and I'm an artist.

I'm currently working on a new project called Alien Sex Club, which is going to be a large-scale performative installation that addresses the subject of HIV in the gay community that will be staged at Ambika P3 in London in summer 2015.

HIV infections among gay men are increasing in the UK by around 3500 each year. People may no longer fear HIV because one a day antiretroviral treatments (or ART) are now available. However, the cost of these drugs to the NHS per patient over their lifetime is around £500,000. Being on ART, like any long- term drug use, has its side effects.

Alien Sex Club puts HIV back on the agenda of visual art thirty years after the AIDS crisis. The visual arts are currently failing to show the contemporary reality of HIV and in so doing are failing in their capacity to influence the debate. Alien Sex Club attempts to deepen the public debate around HIV and ART by displacing the biomedical discourse within an art and architecture one.

I'm working with Dr Alison Rodger who's UCL research programme is assessing HIV transmission in the context of ART for gay men and describing contemporary attitudes, experiences and lifestyles of gay men both living with HIV and at risk of HIV infection.

The project will take the form of a 'cruise maze' as the stage for a series of paintings, sculptures and performances as well as free rapid HIV testing and a number of events.

HIV has moved off the agenda for even the most affected communities and through this project and the collaboration with Dr Alison Rodger I hope to stimulate interest and debate around the subject and expand the boundaries of art.

I need your help in making this happen! If I can raise £10,000, which is 10% of the total funds I require, then I can apply to funding bodies to help realize Alien Sex Club.

I'm offering some incentives to donate which are detailed on the sponsorship page. I hope that you will believe in the importance of the project as much as I do and you can read more about me and find links at johnwalter.net.

Thank you!

The video featured me speaking directly to camera interspersed with short animated sequences of imagery relating to the project (fig.137). The video was two minutes long - short enough to hold people's concentration. I complemented this video with direct emails, Facebook and Twitter promotion and by word of mouth. I quickly raised £2k and then donations dried up. I discovered that crowd funding was a full-time job and that being shy about asking would not work – the more I asked and hassled people the more I received. I decided within the first month that £10k was not a realistic amount but that I could get over £5k. One of the rewards was a limited edition risograph print (fig.138). About £1k of the total £6k came in the final week of the campaign. In the end there were 197 funders. Most of the people who gave money were either directly within my network or extended professional life but about 10% were strangers.



Fig.137. Walter, John (2014). *Still from video for ASC crowd funding campaign*
[Digital image]. Collection of the artist, London.



Fig.138. Walter, John (2014). *Limited edition print as part of the ASC crowd funding campaign* [3 colour risograph, 42 x 59.5cm]. Collection of the artist, London.

I used the funds that I had raised from the crowd funding campaign to bid for £30,000 from the Wellcome Trust by applying for a Small Arts Award in collaboration with Dr Alison Rodger. The remaining £63,000 of the budget (excluding support in kind) came from Arts Council England (ACE) who expect applicants to find 10% of the total budget from other sources and since I had 36% of the total budget from Wellcome and crowd funding combined this strengthened my application. Also because the installation toured outside London this improved it in the eyes of ACE whose motto is 'Art for all.' I came across Alison's work in my research for ASC and during a conversation with an HIV nurse, Janey Sewell, at Dean Street clinic in Soho. Alison's research at UCL and her clinical work at The Royal Free Hospital address changes in the perception of risk around HIV due to improvements in drug technology (Rodger, 2014). Alison embraced the carnivalesque approach my work takes and we established a rapport over artists such as Leigh Bowery and comedian Kenny Everett. The collaboration is strengthened by the distance between our two fields and the lack of competition between us this provides but also by the

shared reference points from popular culture, which help to catalyse and facilitate the exchange. My collaboration with Alison gave me access to a network of sexual health specialists, HIV campaigners and academics that would otherwise not have been so readily available. Furthermore, because our bid was successful it opened many more doors due to the cultural value associated with the Wellcome Trust by scientists and sexual health workers. Notable among these were statistician Dr Valerie Delpech of Public Health England, Professor Sheena McCormack, undertaking research into the effectiveness of PrEP, and Dr Michael Brady from Terrence Higgins Trust (THT). Having the support of Alison's extensive professional network embedded ASC within conversations beyond art and in science and sexual health where the subject matter has most relevance. These individuals were instrumental in attracting people to the installation who were not necessarily typical gallery goers.

ASC was unique in offering free rapid HIV testing to visitors for two hours each day the show was open. It is frequent in gay clubs, bars and saunas for organisations such as THT or GMFA³ to offer free HIV testing and sexual health counselling. This is known as community testing or point-of-care-testing (POCT). Rather than individuals having to visit the sexual health clinic the testing comes to them and this can capture certain individuals who would not otherwise test. The purpose of having HIV testing within ASC was to emulate the POCT and introduce the idea within the installation that testing for HIV and knowing one's status is the best form of HIV prevention in the broader context. Marie Rousseau from THT did the testing at the opening night and twice within the run of the show. She tested around 20 people on the first night and reported that the conversations she had around sexual health with visitors were rich and stimulating. I will discuss this further in the chapter analysing responses to ASC. Organising testing within the installation was difficult on two levels – firstly on a practical level of liaising with Michael Brady from THT to put together a rota of helpers and secondly because of questions of research ethics raised by the Research Office of the University of Westminster. It took a long time for the institution to agree that HIV testing would be ethically conducted and could

occur within Ambika P3, despite the fact that I was not using it to gather any medical data.

ASC raised questions about the value of institutional endorsement. Theory and practice have become increasingly intertwined within contemporary art practice (Ngai, 2012, p77) and ASC exemplifies this development and the conflicts it produces. Indeed, as Sianne Ngai suggests “a culture in which the making of art is institutionally mediated thus encourages art’s internalization of history and thereby theory” (2012, p35); ASC played between different indices of power that include the academic, the commercial, the pharmaceutical and community based. It was supported by an AHRC PhD studentship award that used my artistic practice as an element of research within the context of a University. My use of Ambika P3 for the installation was granted on the basis of my being a research student within the university rather than on the basis of my standing as an artist or for the value of the project as an artwork. This raised issues because the exhibition also had a life beyond the confines of the PhD. Problems arose with the Ambika P3 director about the wording and choice of image for the press release (Appendix 5, p338); she perceived the project to be high risk and potentially controversial and asked me to establish links with the LGBT student society within the university and a former LGBT staff representative for the university. This highlighted that ASC was not a standard exhibition for the venue; ASC has exposed the conventions of the Ambika P3 exhibition programme as focusing on a particular kind of aesthetic intervention within the space that it contradicted by its title, its presentation, its marketing strategy and most notably that it looks to the public as if it has been programmed by the curatorial team of the venue when it hasn’t been (www.p3exhibitions.com). The use of colour, humour and cartooning were sometimes greeted within confusion before the exhibition opened.

I employed an independent curator for the project. This caused friction with the curator of Ambika P3, despite this not being a project that he had initiated. The

independent curator had previously worked at the Zabłudowicz Collection for several years and in her capacity as a writer she is a regular contributor to Frieze magazine. She wanted to be involved in the project from early on. Her role as curator was complicated given the nature of my practice and the way in which I have used spatial design within the installation. She was involved as a critical collaborator and mentor who could help communicate the project to the art world, engage her network and liaise with Ambika P3, advertisers and graphic designers on my behalf – in this sense she was also a project manager. She helped write the press release and edit all the public written materials as well as manage the technicians for the installation and de-installation. My roles within ASC are multiple. I am artist, academic, fund-raiser, accountant, project manager, collaborator and communicator among other things. This causes a number of difficulties the resolution of which are integral to the project. Having a collaborator such as this was very important in helping traverse the range of thresholds that I have described.

Perhaps it is ironic that part of ASC has been purchased by a national museum for their permanent collection given the aim of the project to challenge the existing discourse on HIV in visual art. The Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool have acquired a large painting, two digital paintings, a neon, 12 framed drawings, a video, the soundtrack, a marrow, a capsid and the tarot reading performance as part of an Art Fund grant they received in order to collect work by contemporary LGBT artists. This is the first time that the museum has acquired a performance, which present challenges for them in terms of cataloguing, costing, and staging in future. The independent curator worked with Walker Gallery curators during the lead up to ASC in order to negotiate the acquisition. On one hand the acquisition commemorates ASC as being an innovative piece of work, worthy of collecting, on the other hand it diffuses the disruptive potential of the work to question the mainstream:

The museum's basic technique of display – placing works removed from their original context next to and between others similarly removed from

theirs – generates a frame of implicit commentary around each individual work (Bourriaud, 1998, p35).

The Walker Gallery have canonised the installation but also potentially compromised it. The work will be exhibited in a room of the museum in 2017 and it will remain to see how these works operate within the spatial configuration of the galleries, which it was not designed for. The selection of works focuses on PrEP and Truvada, which they perceive to be a contemporary way of telling the HIV story. ASC does not talk the language of the HIV debate as it is currently formulated in visual art but in time it may become the model for other artists exploring the subject.

¹ Scumbling is a painting term for the application of a washy or dry area of colour on top of another flatter area in order to create visual depth and atmosphere.

² A build-up of textured paint beneath a surface layer that shows through.

³ Originally Gay Men Fighting AIDS <http://www.gmfa.org.uk/>

6
Analysing Responses to Alien Sex Club

The practice-based aspect of ASC operated as a fulcrum for gathering data relating to the way in which HIV was discussed in relation to the installation. Those involved in the discussion included artists, curators and arts writers. Due to the nature of the project I have also included the responses of medical practitioners, sexual health workers and scientists who were involved in ASC. I gathered data from press reviews, interviews and social media posts relating to ASC. The full data is gathered in a series of appendices; reviews in appendix 2, p282; interviews in appendix 3, p300; social media posts in appendix 4, p317. This chapter uses the responses of audiences to my representation of HIV in order to analyse ASC. The categories through which I have chosen to frame this discussion – group show, cardboard, playfulness, zaniness, relating differently to AIDS and humour - have emerged directly from these responses. Certain issues overlap between these categories but they enable me to reflect on how staging the installation has changed the discussion of HIV as well as my own artistic practice. I draw on a number of key theoretical resources including Sianne Ngai's work on aesthetics (2012), Marcia Tucker's essay for the *"Bad" Painting* exhibition at the New Museum (1978) and Butt and Rogoff (2013) and White's (1993) works on seriousness and humour.

6.1 Group Show

Does size really matter? In the case of ASC it may do. References to the "epic scale of the show" (Appendix 3.11, p316) and descriptions of ASC in reviews as an "epic installation" (Appendix 2.6, p293) placed value on the size and complexity of the exhibition. One response from an interview with a visitor to the exhibition represented a broader tendency to refer to ASC in terms its scale and the quantity of works it contained:

Both on Twitter and in person, many of the comments about the exhibition all mentioned the scale and sheer amount of work within it (Appendix 3.3, p305).

Creating something that immerses the viewer as opposed to having them look at it from the outside may produce a different experience of the subject. However, the word epic here may refer not only to the large scale of the installation but also connote something narratively complex. ASC uses scale and complexity in order to mythologise HIV as an epic problem. In this sense the use of the word epic to describe the installation connotes that of epic poetry. A more accurate way of understanding the discussion of the scale of ASC might be to think of it as mock-epic in the sense that it operates as satire. The installation employed bathos - a literary concept defined as an effect of anticlimax created by an unintentional lapse in mood from the sublime to the trivial or ridiculous - in order to question the somber tone sometimes associated with the subject and offers an alternative way of addressing HIV. Scale and complexity conveyed importance upon the HIV subject. They also served to change the vantage point of audiences to the subject by placing them within it rather than without.

The way in which scale is valued in the responses to ASC may perform according to what Sianne Ngai identifies as the aesthetic category of the “interesting” (2012, p30). For Ngai this apparently minor aesthetic judgment is related to larger cultural questions of boredom, plurality and circumspection. She suggests that conceptual art of the 1960’s epitomises the interesting in its use of information as a material and a form of presentation. ASC was made up of a number of different series of works, which were then mixed together and displayed as a larger conglomeration. Ngai suggests that seriality is a key tenet of the interesting in that it sustains our interest by establishing novelty through repetition (2012, p149). This is true of the framed drawings that use the grid as an organizational device that allows viewers to compare and contrast, removing them from hierarchical analysis (Volume 2, fig.30, p62). This critique further applies to my books of paintings, which due to the nature of the form can only be opened to one page at a time and thus prevent comparison and value judgment of the images within. Overall, the use of non-linear narratives throughout ASC corresponded to the observation that “The less predictable a narrative is, the more interesting (engaging, fascinating) it is” (Ngai, 2012, p138). Applying Ngai’s

aesthetic conception to ASC suggests that it employed the interesting on multiple levels to justify its existence, not only through formal and material repetitions but also in its choice of subject matter.

However, ASC differed from this model in that it was not composed in a homogeneous way. Jason Rhoades' 2005 installation at Hauser and Wirth *The Black Pussy...and the Pagan Idol Workshop* (fig.139) featured a cacophony of neon signs, carpets, stones, shelving units and cabling, the overall shape of which was complex to grasp. The arrangement of elements within ASC allowed for heterogeneous zones to be identified and in this way it may have differed from the way in which Rhoades' installation was composed. Irit Rogoff argues that heterogeneity is a true reflection of our contemporary reality:

...the work of seriousness is founded in an ability to deal with heterogeneity, or, perhaps more strongly, to live out heterogeneity...So adhering to a single argument, to a single logic, or not to a single way of being, is something that we can't recapture – it's not something that is possible for us any longer (Butt and Rogoff, 2013, pp22-23).

The different visual styles, languages and media that make up ASC preserve their individual qualities as fragments that are orchestrated into a larger whole. Responses to ASC often focused on the multifariousness of my output as an artist. An invigilator at the exhibition reported "Lots of people enquired as to if the exhibition was group or solo" (Appendix 3.9, p313). This discussion on Monocle Radio highlights the confusion as to whether the installation was a group show curated by me or the work of a single artist:

Robert Bound: Um, so John Walter is the artist...

Francesca Gavin: uh-huh!

RB: um and it seems like one of those things, do you get the idea that when you're walking through it that there is one artist's imagination at work, cos it seems, just from what I've read around it that it's almost its it feels like a sort of group show of stuff?

FG: You really feel, even though there are collaborative performance elements in particular, you really feel like it's a specific artist's aesthetic, if nothing else, because he's very much into exploring a repetition of these kind of fluoro colours, these kind of blobby, almost virus shaped characters. It's very much like a certain person's point of view but it feels like something much more conversational in that sense. But you really feel like it's one person gone wild being given a strange space under a car park (Appendix 2.7, pp296-297).

The use of the word “conversational” is another way of saying polyvocal. Different types of objects with different material properties and the appearance of different authorships can be seen to be talking to each other.

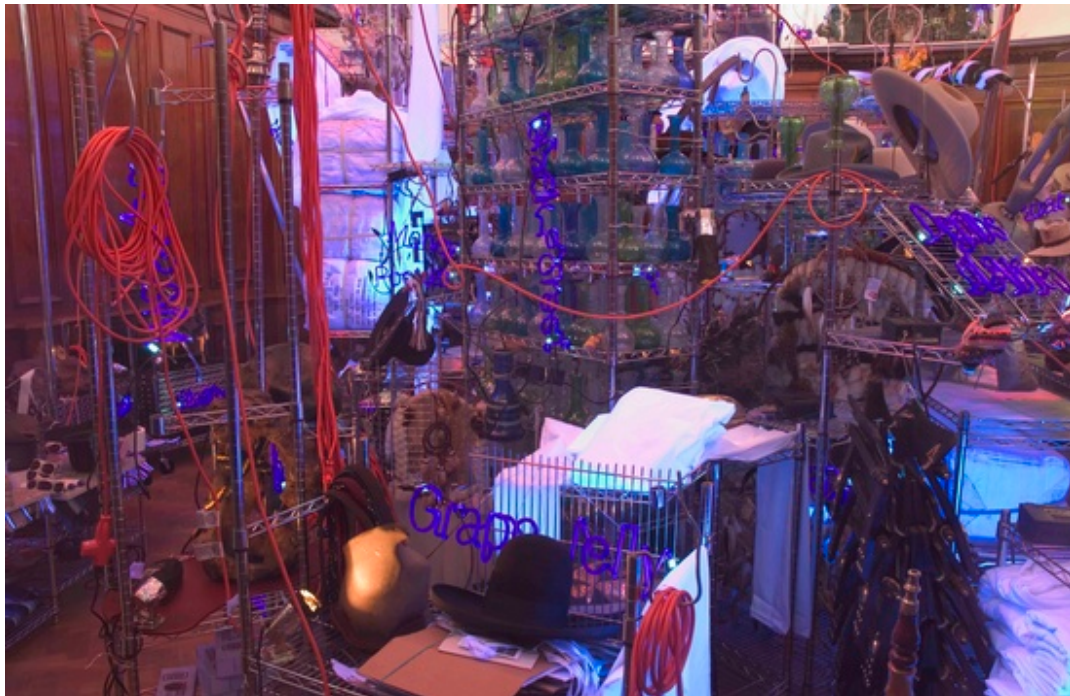


Fig.139. Rhoades, Jason (2005). *The Black Pussy and the Pagan Idol Workshop* [Installation]. Hauser and Wirth, London.

6.2 Cardboard

Walls of honeycomb board were joined together with cable ties to create inexpensive partitions within the space and large expanses of colour and pattern (fig.140). Part of the discussion around ASC focused on the production values and material properties of the installation:

Francesca Gavin: Yeah, it's basically like a cardboard version of dark rooms

Robert Bound: sounds like the Crystal Maze but with a strange kind of sexual ethic

FG: It's not like going to Berghain and disappearing in some like...

RB: It sounds a bit like it might be (Appendix 2.7, pp295-296).

This is both an observation of the amount of cardboard that was used in the installation and also a value judgment about a particular kind of production technique. Reference to the cardboard nature of the installation alludes to its material precarity. Cardboard has connotations of lightness and temporariness. The physical, and by implication metaphorical, lightness of ASC was one of the things that enabled the discussion of difficult subjects such as HIV. This brings to mind the work of Brian Cyril Griffiths, whose installations made of cardboard, such as "Osaka, Taylor and Ron" (fig.141), were exhibited extensively during the 1990s, including as part of *The New Neurotic Realism* at the Saatchi Gallery in 1998, which I saw as a young art student and was influenced by. This exhibition also featured the neo-"Bad" paintings of Martin Maloney. Furthermore, reference to the "Crystal Maze" - a TV game show on Channel 4 during the 1990's hosted by camp icon and star of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" Richard O'Brien - positions the discussion of ASC within a queer realm as well as a light-hearted one. It emphasises the zone-like qualities of ASC as being heterogeneous and cruise maze-like in its design.

There were awkward curatorial decisions made within ASC that made the viewing experience strange and stimulating:

People accustomed to viewing art, which can be very one way experience or cold, were prompted to engage in a way which in my experience is atypical (Appendix 3.4, p306).

This response suggests that the viewing experience at ASC was reciprocal, warm and engaging for the viewer. This was achieved in part through the material qualities of the work, the arrangement of objects in relation to one another, the arrangement of objects in relation to the viewer and the integration of live elements into the overall curatorial scheme. For example un-stretched paintings hung with metal eyelets lapped from the wall onto the floor (fig.142) or overlapped each other on the walls, sometimes on top of shimmer curtain or even underneath it (fig.143). Views of the work were obscured and works were hung at angles different to those at which the work had been made. This approach to curating artworks in an unconventional way served to estrange the viewer and refresh their experience of the subject – forcing them out of their comfort zone for a moment and confronting expectations about how a gallery, an exhibition or a painting should perform. Hanging paintings in this way was unorthodox and questioned the conventions of prevailing good taste.



Fig.140. Walter, John (2015). *The cardboard wall building system within Alien Sex Club* [Installation]. Ambika P3, London.



Fig.141. Griffiths, Brian Cyril (1998). *Osaka, Taylor and Ron* [Cardboard installation, New Neurotic Realism]. Saatchi Gallery, London.



Fig.142. Walter, John (2015). *Alien Sex Club* [Installation]. Ambika P3, London.



Fig.143. Walter, John (2015). *Alien Sex Club* [Installation]. Ambika P3, London.

The physical estrangement of works from conventional modes of presentation in ASC extended to the scuffs and drips left on works, which other artists might eliminate in search of a different type of finish. Marcia Tucker's essay for the *"Bad" Painting* exhibition at the New Museum in New York in 1978 offers a precedent for considering the particular material treatments operating within ASC. *"Bad" Painting* is the cousin of Pincus-Witten's Maximalist painting in some respects and in Tucker's words it offers a "challenge to the conventions of minimalism" (1978, p7). This challenge is manifest in the way it prioritises the figure over other subjects and also in the way it treats painting by embracing ugliness, distortion, scratches, buckling, mess, chips, dribbles and cracks. ASC corresponded to many of Tucker's descriptions of *"Bad" Painting*. For example it is described at one point as "forcing the viewer to continuously choose between extremes of vulgarity and elegance" (Tucker, 1978, p17). This approach served to challenge the prevailing ways of addressing HIV in an equivalent way to *"Bad" Painting's* parody of the prevailing, Minimalist aesthetic codes of the day:

Parody is thus used by artists to express the inexpressible, to create a formal and psychological imbalance which will counterpoint the corresponding paradox and schisms within the society in which the works are created (Tucker, 1978, p21).

ASC functioned critically as a way of imagining an alternate reality for art that addresses HIV.

ASC differed from *"Bad" Painting* in the range of material processes it employed. As a cousin of badness I wish to propose shonkiness as a better way of identifying the material properties at work within ASC. The literal meaning of the word shonky is something or someone unreliable or dishonest but also having a connotation of familiarity or charm. The unreliability of the installation lies in its material precarity. Honeycomb board is very sensitive to being handled. It responds well to being treated with a craft knife to make folds and bends in order to articulate the surface but is also easily dented and develops soft corners and buckles when painted or wallpapered. These effects of distortion and

degradation became integral parts of how the installation was presented and perceived as awkward. This aesthetic awkwardness can be seen as a kind of charm that operates in conjunction with badness to seduce viewers into engaging with the work. This brings to mind Walter Benjamin's observation of the Dadaists that they "attached much less importance to the sales value of their work than to its uselessness for contemplative immersion. The studied degradation of their material was not the least of their means to achieve this uselessness" (Benjamin, 1935, p228). Shonkiness is a method of introducing aura into artworks that may involve mechanically reproduced elements. Within ASC the primary vehicle for representation was graphic rather than photographic representation. So even in the elements that were digitally produced, such as the wallpapers or tarot cards, there is evidence of the hand – often once in drawing using the Wacom tablet and a second time in the application of wallpaper paste. Objects acquired uniqueness through their shonky treatment and the acquisition of dust, crinkling, smudges and breakages that accumulate within and upon the object. Thus shonkiness indexes aura in the way that the brush mark indexes authorship in painting. Shonkiness privileges a transgression of craft technique equivalent to, but differing from, the transgression in classical drawing technique evidenced by *"Bad" Painting*. Shonkiness has something in common with Halberstam's theory of queer failure when they assert that "we can also recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline as a form of critique" (2011, p88).

6.3 Zaniness

In her review of ASC in *The Guardian* Skye Sherwin described the installation as "tackling HIV and its place in popular culture with fortune tellers, zany cartoons, psychedelic wallpaper and suggestive vegetables in hats" (Appendix 2.8, p298). This reference to zaniness has enabled me to think about my Maximalist aesthetic and the role that performance played within ASC in new ways. Sianne Ngai has identified zaniness as one of the key aesthetic categories operating in contemporary culture associated with visual excess and prolificness (Ngai,

2012). My role within ASC demonstrated many of Ngai's definitions of the zany, such as a polymath involved in "incessant experimentation" (Ngai, 2012, p220) and as an artist with "absolute adaptability" (Ngai, 2012, p189). My zaniness can be seen on two levels; firstly for the way in which I employed labour as play in my studio practice (Ngai, 2012, p51) and secondly for the way in which I used carnivalesque performance as a curatorial device within the installation (Volume 2, p84). For Ngai the contemporary artist is required to perform multiple roles and this is related to shifts in the economy as a whole:

...one must therefore at least consider the possibility that postindustrial zaniness is not just an aesthetic about the shrinking distinction between work and play but also the shrinking of an aesthetic capacity caused by it (Ngai, 2012, p231).

Interpreting ASC through this lens suggests that the installation corresponded to broader cultural shifts that are transmitted via zaniness. The multiple voices that I have employed within the installation relate to the zany. The zany is distinct from the fool, clown or jester and comes from the commedia dell'arte character "zanni", an itinerant labourer:

...calling someone zany is often synonymous with dismissing him or her as "crazy", a way of simultaneously acknowledging the negativity of the any person but also that negativity's lack of any real impact on us (Ngai, 2012, p24).

Zaniness then draws into question my role as an artist within late capitalism and the "role faith" (Ngai, 2012, pp204-5) involved in performing being an artist today. Zaniness may well be the flipside of the carnivalesque. Employing carnivalesque strategies allows artists to engage audiences in playful and provocative ways. However, the same carnivalesque strategies are increasingly appropriated for capitalism in the guise of the zany rather than being used to emancipate the viewer.

Two key carnivalesque moments within ASC – the tarot reading and the bar - drew on strategies related to relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 1998). One interviewee observes the effects of these live elements:

It was also social, I've never been to a show where I've propped up a bar and got pissed on gin or had my tarot read or watched people walk around with baby marrows! I actually remember it as an event and not as an exhibition (Appendix 3.8, p311).

The characteristic of the event that is observed provides a moment of animation that contrasts with the static objects within the exhibition. The disciplines of live art and painting were aggregated within ASC. ASC destabilised the aesthetic thresholds of both disciplines, posing questions of both relational aesthetics and painting. Objects within ASC sat along a spectrum that encompassed value systems ranging from set design, prop and costume to wunderkabinett and alter piece. The clothes that I made for the performers to wear can be seen as objects worthy of aesthetic contemplation in their own right but they also functioned as costumes. The traditional hierarchy in the gallery between the functional and the functionless was questioned within ASC. The installation did not conform to the consensual process by which the object is removed from its original context and function to be displayed within the museum (Bourriaud, 1998, p35). The installation differed from Bourriaud's examples of relational aesthetics in the way that it equally privileged object and experience.

The use of live art within ASC differed from the use of events within relational aesthetics. I will therefore refer to the live aspects of ASC as hospitality because they served to negotiate between the viewer and the object (Volume 2, fig.64, p84). The bartender and tarot reader were pivotal moments in visitors journey through the space, allowing them moments to reflect on what they had seen so far, comment on it, and ask questions of it:

Walter wants viewers to feel that they are entering a world, and be fully immersed into it – the intention is not to intimidate or make people uncomfortable. In fact, quite the opposite – Walter uses performance to be hospitable and spark conversations (Appendix 2.2, p285).

The conversation between people that was triggered by the hospitality of ASC became the model from which objects were curated together into conversational arrangements (Volume 2, fig.47, p73). The way performers were dressed can be seen as a form of drag that was jestered as opposed to gendered. By drag I mean that the costume enabled a performance of self that differed from their daily self. Just as a drag queen might wear women's clothes to transform the social index from male to female my costumes served to transform performers from serious to humorous. This expands on Ngai's discussion of the zany as a:

“ludicrous” character that “attempts feebly” (that is, poorly) to “mimic the tricks of the clown” in “old comedies” (Ngai, 2012, p25).

Performing the zany allowed viewers to be at ease to engage with The Chem Jester or Barbara Truvada. Performing the fool allowed visitors to ask questions without censoring themselves.

ASC also became a space in which audience members were permitted to perform self in alternate ways to the space outside the installation. This was demonstrated in the way they used artworks to double voice their own narratives. Several responses to the exhibition on Instagram featured audience members posing with artworks and appropriating images and texts from the installation. A man was photographed standing next to the digital painting of Dame Edna. He is shown mimicking her surprised expression (fig.144). The caption reads “I’m Truvada Tra[n]ced people...!”. Perhaps this is a moment of recognition? Truvada is the brand name of a Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) drug produced by pharmaceutical company Gilead. This audience member has used a number of hashtags including #truvadawhore to associate the painting with the discussion around PrEP. Furthermore The LGBT Center in San Diego appropriated a different photo of the “Truvada Trance” painting from Instagram to help promote their sexual health campaign (fig.145). Another audience member posed with a number of tarot cards in a succession of posts including

the card “Temperance” (Volume 2, fig.312), which depicts Eastenders actress Daniella Westbrook, whose septum wore aware from her prolific cocaine use. The visitor imitates her gesture by pulling an upturned nose towards the camera, associating the card with recreational drug use (fig.146). ASC became the material for visitors’ own appropriation and quotation. ASC was used as a toolbox for audiences to perform and reinvent self, using a series of images associated with sexual preference, gender and queer culture that could be rearranged to create new meanings and associations a lot like the tarot cards themselves. One Instagram response shows the “Ancestor” tarot card - depicting artist Keith Haring (Volume 2, fig.324, p220) - and applies a black and white filter to the image (fig.147). The effect is to return the image of Haring from humourous to serious, inverting my transformations of the image and re-authoring it.



Fig.144. Instagram (2015). *Visitor to the London exhibition poses in front of a digital painting Truvada Trance imitating the facial expression of Dame Edna.*

Available from <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/aliensexclub/>

[Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.145. Instagram (2015). *The LBGT center in San Diego reposted this photo from Instagram.* Available from <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/aliensexclub/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

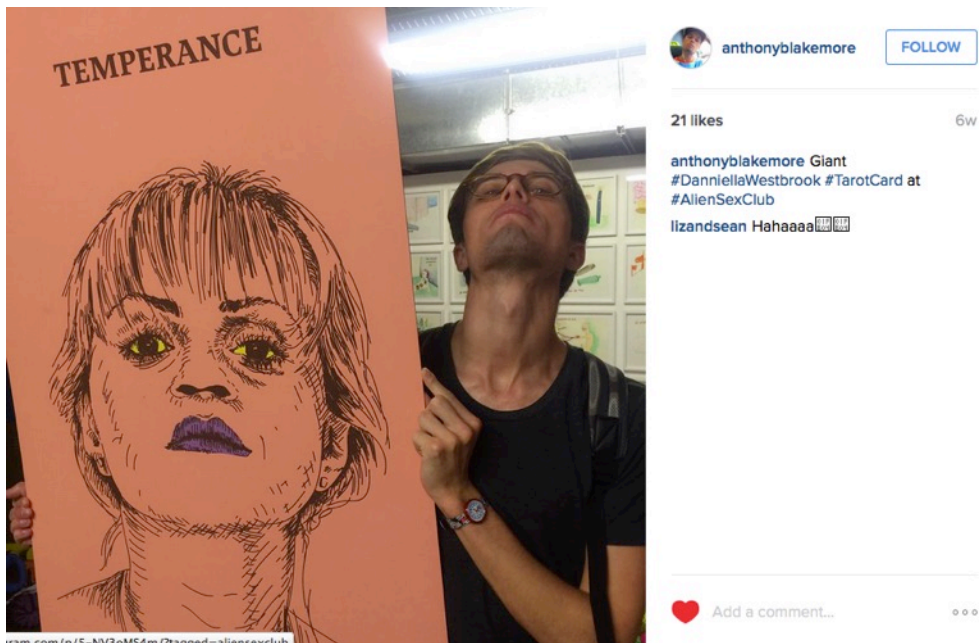


Fig.146. Instagram (2015). *A visitor to ASC poses with the Temperance card on Instagram.* Available from <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/aliensexclub/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.147. Instagram (2015). *Black and White filter placed on photograph of Keith Haring – the Ancestor tarot card.* Available from <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/aliensexclub/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].



Fig.148. Crow (1981). *Chock-a-block* [television programme] BBC. 28 May 1981. Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnWcm5dr45s> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

6.4 Playfulness

Several responses to ASC described it as “playful” (Appendix 3.8, p312). This playfulness refers to the way in which materials, colours and patterns were deployed to engage the viewer and freshly address HIV. In the Monocle Radio interview the speakers related the playfulness of the installation to certain types of children’s television programmes:

Francesca Gavin: Yeah but it’s much more like kind of playful. It is quite Crystal Maze out of cardboard dressed in, kind of covered in like fluoro bobbles, kind of – it’s very playful and it’s kind of got that kind of British DIY children’s television vibe about it

Robert Bound: oh really yes, it does seem like that it seems a bit Choc-A-Block, or a bit like the test card, a bit like a really strange, eerie version of the test card, or maybe a very witty version of it?

FG: Yes very much so, a quite early 90’s version of it (Appendix 2.7, p296).

There is an attempt to understand the material properties of the installation by relating them to the kind of materials one might find in craft programmes or in primary schools. ASC can be seen at first glance as a kind of toy town but it employed a range of techniques and processes both traditional and cutting edge or high and low craft that disrupted this initial reading. *Chock-A-Block* (fig.148) was a children’s television programme from the early 1980s that I grew up watching. It focused around a brightly coloured computer modeled on a mainframe computer of the day that housed a video player and a number of chunky dials and buttons. A human would operate the computer by inserting blocks of wood akin to videotapes into a slot that would trigger things to happen. The specific reference to *Chock-A-Block* suggests both an infantile element as well as a kind of anachronistic technology at work in ASC. This discussion relates to Sianne Ngai’s study of the cute. She suggests that certain infantile forms of anthropomorphism, manifest cuteness, in fact represent the removal of power (2012, p54). This has ramifications on how works like “Pugvirus” (Volume 2, fig.1, p42) are read. “Pugvirus” was a four metre high inflatable pink head representing an imaginary virus. Its scale was designed to compete with the

space of Ambika P3. The simplicity of its form was dictated by the material transformation of the image from a 3D printed form (Volume 2, fig.418, p248), 10cm high, to a version sewn in fabric. Ngai equates the cute with the mute. Discussing the derivation of the word cute from the word acute she explains:

Cute thus exemplifies a situation in which making a word smaller – or, if you like, cuter – results in an uncanny reversal, changing its meaning into its exact opposite (Ngai, 2012, p87).

Is it that “Pugvirus” removed power from the HIV debate, softening it and reducing it? Or is it that the cuteness of “Pugvirus” was unthreatening and allowed audiences that would otherwise have been scared of HIV to address the subject? One visitor to the exhibition posted a photo of the sculpture on Instagram titled at a 45 degree angle with the caption “Giant Inflatable HIV Virus at the Alien Sex Club – So random!” (fig.149). This response encapsulates the disorientation many visitors encountered at the playful treatment of the subject, Within the installation the cuteness of “Pugvirus” was used as playful counterpoint to more confrontational aspects such as free rapid HIV testing.



Fig.149. Instagram (2015). *Giant inflatable HIV virus at the Alien Sex Club. So random!* Available from <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/aliensexclub/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

6.5 Relating differently to AIDS

ASC engaged people in thinking about HIV that might not have previously thought about the virus. The installation collapsed what Allon White has referred to as the division between the playground and the classroom in the way that it educated audiences about HIV (1993, p133). It was designed to introduce new audience members to art and HIV by educating them differently to previous exhibitions devoted to the subject. Visitors were offered a number of interactions with invigilators and performers that enabled discussion of HIV to happen in unconventional ways. There was a pedagogical aspect to the installation that differed from exclusively medical approaches. One interviewee observed “scientists can sometimes understand the technical aspects of something without totally grasping the spirit of the subject” (Appendix 3.4, p306) and another interviewee observed “it’s not about ‘explaining’ science or art but making new experiences and thoughts from these multiple experiences of the world” (Appendix 3.8, p312). One specific way in which the installation changed how audiences relate to HIV and AIDS was in the way antiretroviral drugs were represented:

It was thought provoking in how the medical “drugs” could be seen in a visual way that did not make them seem scary or threatening. There was an element of reminiscence for me, but not sadness that I have always experienced at previous representations (Appendix 3.10, p315).

ASC was not nostalgic about AIDS. The subject of HIV today involves addressing testing, treatment and side effects, which are less dramatic than death. Images were piled up within the installation and aggregated to form new contexts and new meanings. In the case of the HIV drugs they were represented as part of a wider field of associations:

...my main association with HIV in the arts has been around deaths from AIDS, and of seeing it treated as very much a serious, sad topic, and as a death sentence, not as a disease with an ongoing management strategy and potential future treatments (Appendix 3.3, p305).

There is optimism surrounding the virus now that there wasn't twenty years ago and this optimism requires an appropriate voice and aesthetic treatment that is not the old somber treatment of the subject. ASC changed our relationship to HIV by changing the context in which the virus was placed, how it was depicted and how HIV testing was positioned. Importantly the installation was not a clinical environment and this enabled visitors to relate differently to HIV because it "made it non-hierarchical, as the transfer of information from clinical staff to patient can sometimes feel" (Appendix 3.1, p303). One response states, "I thought it was a really stimulating unthreatening space in which to discuss a very serious topic" and continues, "the exhibition really changed my perceptions" (Appendix 3.3, p305). ASC took textbook illustrations and contextualised them within a larger visual field.

One of the core ways in which the installation engaged and educated the general public about HIV was by using a frame of reference that drew on popular culture. Responses show that the use of familiar images to address the subject allowed people who maybe knew nothing of HIV or cruising to engage in the work:

Discussing it with my husband afterwards, we both commented on the number of art historical and pop cultural references within the works. I also visited with my colleagues who aren't regular gallery visitors and the pop cultural references really helped give them a way in to understand the work (Appendix 3.8, p305).

The imagery within the installation constantly shifted register between high to low cultural reference points and back again. These included allusions to Raphael paintings, TV actors, Greek mythological figures and Disney cartoons. One interviewee reported that certain images acted as a lure for certain audience members:

My gay friends responded to the fact that it had many iconic images and characters from gay/popular culture and this meant that they could relate to it and found in the exhibition a space both actual and cultural that they could recognise (Appendix 3.8, p311).

Soap opera TV heroines such as Gail Platt, Deirdre Barlow and Alma Sedgwick from Coronation Street or Dot Cotton from Eastenders proved particularly popular. Responses to ASC on Instagram show some visitors collected images and recomposed them into their own narrative versions of the exhibition (fig.150). The inclusion of these images gave people a visual hook upon which they could navigate other content within the exhibition. Whilst such characters do not have any direct reference to HIV they do exist within an accepted canon of camp heroines, which provide cultural shorthand for gay men to connect with. These heroines were repurposed as signs within ASC through which viewers could measure and interpret other less familiar images and ideas.



Fig.150. Instagram (2015). *Instagram post showing a collection of TV heroines from the tarot set and the Shrinkies.* Available from <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/aliensexclub/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

In the discussion on Monocle Radio the exhibition was described as being “all about our relationship to AIDS, but in a brilliant way” (Appendix 2.7, p295). This discussion focused on the costume for “Pom-Pom-Tom” (fig.151), a customised onesie (a kind of one piece pyjama) covered in enormous brightly coloured,

handmade pom-poms, which they compared to Harrison Ford's 2008 Halloween costume (fig.152):

Robert Bound: ...I want to talk to you about one of his works, which is called Strange Positioning¹ 2014 by John Walter, it's the image there at the top. To paint a picture for our listeners it's a bit like, if people at home might want to Google Harrison Ford's Halloween costume from a couple of years ago – he went as a pod of peas

Francesca Gavin: *laughs*

RB: as a human pod of peas, and it looks a bit like that – strange one - and he's playing with AIDS and with the virus and the whole rest of it

FG: Yeah it was a big kind of cushiony thing with different multi-coloured...you know the bobbles you get on top of Christmas, of like winter woolly hats?

RB: yeah

FG: It was that but in like a cushion form as a take on our relationship to the medical and science, which I think is so whacky and out there and listen, technically this is not the most sophisticated show you'll go and see but it's definitely fresh and it's definitely feeling like a certain person's voice and if nothing else, just alone for getting people to (a) feel comfortable taking an HIV test not in a clinic environment or even have the discussion about that I think it's really positive (Appendix 2.7, pp297-298).

As with the discussion earlier about cardboard there is an emphasis on the lightness of the materials, here emphasizing the “cushion form” of my viral representations. I think that it's exactly because of the lack of technical sophistication in my use of images and materials that makes HIV less complicated to understand. Without dumbing down the science the way I have represented HIV has made it more accessible and fun. Through perversity ASC helped shift the way audiences relate to HIV and AIDS by celebrating the virus as opposed to making it scary.

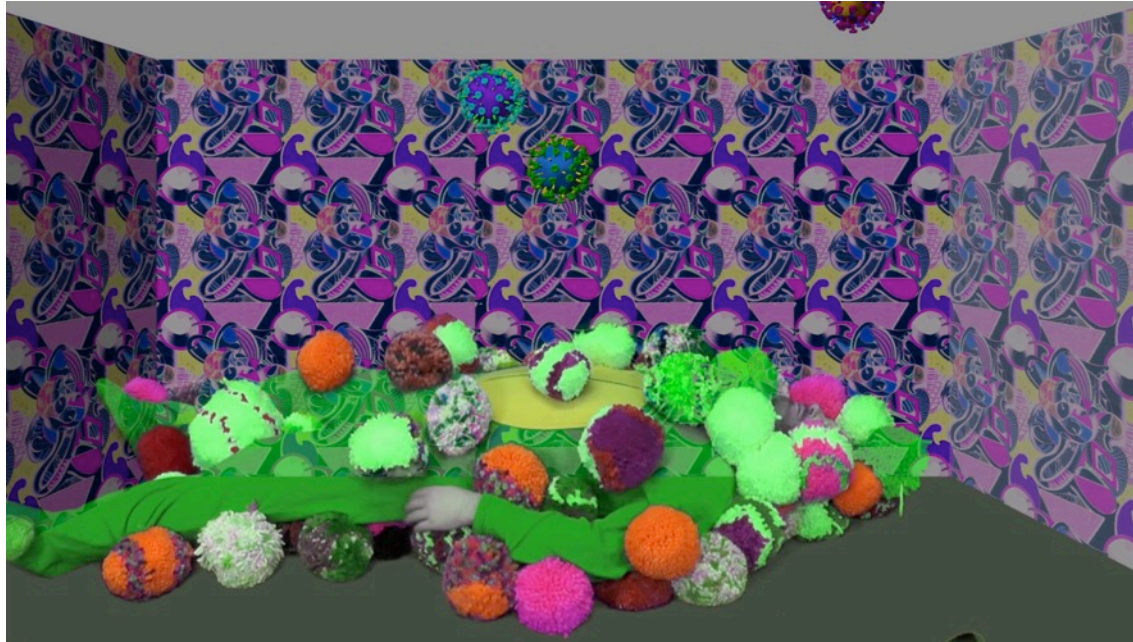


Fig.151. Walter, John (2013). *Strategic Positioning* [Still from HD video, 5'00"].
The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.



Fig.152. Zimbio (2008). *Harrison Ford's Halloween costume*. Available from
<http://www.zimbio.com/photos/Harrison+Ford/Harrison+Calista+Hip+Peas+Pod+Halloween/hUMDoYGeQyk> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

6.6 Humour

One of the main ways in which ASC enabled people to relate differently to HIV was through its use of humour. The response of one visitor to the exhibition highlighted the tonal disruption between the subject and how it was addressed in a photograph posted on Instagram of the “Pride Banner” (Volume 2 fig.445, p264) with the caption “brilliantly bonkers but with a powerful message underlying it all” (fig.153). Monocle Radio reiterates this sentiment:

Robert Bound: and in a really witty, not the big grey tombstone that scared people in the 80’s this is taking it to some phenomenal extra dimension

Francesca Gavin: It’s really interesting cos it’s a subject that was obviously hugely important, particularly in the 80’s and the 90’s in contemporary art, and in contemporary culture, and then it’s really disappeared from the conversation and I think this show does a brilliant job of making a really fun, very very British, kind of mental, trance-rave combination look at what our relationship to that is. I mean they have like a pop up, they have doctors there, where you can have really fast HIV tests, within the context of also having... I had a tarot card read, and one of my tarot cards was chlamydia – it was kind of, it was hilarious! It’s kind of witty and funny and makes it seem something that you can learn about in a really accessible way but also is a valid artwork, in its own sense (Appendix 2.7, p295).

The “Tombstone” advert that he refers to here was a scary public health campaign equating AIDS with death well before there was any effective treatment for the virus. Positioning discussion of the type of humour used in ASC as “very very British” may suggest that the work was eccentric, idiosyncratic or bawdy. Sally O’Reilly has explored the nature of British humour in her essay *Bawdy Beautiful* for the catalogue to the exhibition *Rude Britannia: British Comic Art* (Batchelor, 2010). She examines the conventions of the seaside postcard in order to critique a range of tendencies that we may identify as British humour:

Codes of behaviour were partially suspended as holidaymakers enjoyed a relaxation of the moral muscle, the postcard offering a glimpse of the warm rock pool of abandon to those back at home... (Batchelor, 2010, p110).

The holiday is a liminal space in which codes can be switched and hierarchies of taste and class inverted. In this sense ASC was both a holiday from the world outside as well as a holiday from HIV as we know it. Within the installation the colours of the seaside were bought within the gallery, as were some of the performances via videos and live actions such as the bar and tarot reading. ASC took the existing representation of HIV and inverted its rules, one visitor observes:

He appears to be attempting to subvert received manners and perceptions, whether they involve 'fine' arts, sexuality, polite society or throw away sex and culture via ridiculous and ridiculing play (Appendix 2.3, p287).

Making fun of the way HIV and AIDS have been addressed to date in order to update the discussion differs from making fun of the subject itself. In the digital painting "AIDS Husbandry" (Volume 2, fig.167, p139) a drawing of an ugly old woman from the National Gallery was captioned with the words AIDS Husbandry in bubble writing. The phrase is a word play on the way the word breeding, which is used in relation to bareback (unprotected) sex. This was jarring and funny partly because of the baldness of the phrase, partly because the words were written in a bubble font and partly because of the disjunction in meaning between the phrase and the image. The disruption between serious and funny provoked a response from viewers.

Now that HIV is a treatable condition, and no longer a tragedy in the West as it was in the 1980s, ASC sought to interrupt the existing treatment of the subject using humour. Louisa Buck suggested of the installation that "Funny and deathly serious collide throughout" (Appendix 2.1, p284). One respondent observed that this tonal contradiction is exactly how ASC broke from previous representations:

Often the handling of the subject is done so with one note or mood, in ASC the solemnity of the subject is certainly present but it is imbedded, there are many notes, which I believe truly honors the complexity of life with, in

and around the virus, it actual honors the complexity of the virus itself (Appendix 3.4, p306).

The tonal shifts between humour and seriousness created a critical distance for the viewer to consider the virus as more than just a demon. HIV is a fascinating virus because it is such a clever trickster. Respect for the ingenuity of HIV informed how I was then able to critique it. Irit Rogoff challenges the mutual exclusivity of seriousness and humour when she talks of “performances of seriousness” (2013, p20). This establishes the existence of a rhetorical form of seriousness that is often pious, earnest and pompous and poses the question “Is being serious just a way, then, of *reproducing seriousness itself?*” [emphasis of the author] (Butt and Rogoff, 2013, p67). ASC collapsed seriousness and humour together, hybridising them and juxtaposing them to reanimate discussion of HIV. Despite trepidation about my work before visiting the installation one respondent placed ASC within a tradition of artworks that have used tragic-comedy to address the HIV crisis, describing it as “gallows humor” (Appendix 2.3, p287). In challenging the dominant representational modes for addressing HIV ASC questioned seriousness as the exclusive or most suitable method. Allon White suggests that employing a serious voice is a way of taking power:

Seriousness always has more to do with power than with content. The authority to designate what is to be taken seriously (and the authority to enforce reverential solemnity in certain contexts) is a way of creating and maintaining power (White, 1993, p128).

Scientific and medical gatekeepers dominate the discussion of HIV. By extension their framework has controlled the discussion within visual art as well. ASC called this hegemony into question. ASC also exposed a hierarchy around the subject of HIV, which is dominated by HIV positive people. ASC attempted to include new voices in the discussion of HIV as a way of refreshing the debate around the subject. However, this open involvement was controversial among some audience members:

I'm not sure he always stays on the right side of respect for the lived experience of the kind of people he is making part of his theatre (me for instance). There is a danger of lampooning those who are actually victims,

making them seem buffoons for making mistakes in a difficult world (Appendix 2.3, p287).

ASC expanded the definition of who is included in talking about HIV - not just artists and academics but the general public too, and not just gay men and HIV positive people but women and HIV negative people too. It also opened up what can be included in representing HIV by establishing a visual and intellectual field large enough to allow audiences to educate themselves and navigate their own way around the subject and most importantly to benefit from HIV as a fascinating subject in its own right.



Fig.153. Instagram (2015). *Finally made it john John Walter's Alien Sex Club at Ambika P3 just before it closes. Brilliantly bonkers but with a powerful message underlying it al. hashtags: johnwalter, ambikap3, HIV, PrEP.* Available from <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/aliensexclub/> [Accessed 1 August 2016].

¹ The title of the video is actually "Strategic Positioning".

Conclusion

Alien Sex Club responded to a rise in HIV infections among gay men in the West (Aghaizu et al. 2013) by treating it as a crisis of representation. The project sought to use art and design as vehicles for drawing attention to the problem. The PhD mobilised my artistic practice in order to tackle the subject in the form of a large-scale public installation. My conclusions address how the exhibition and the conversations it has generated meet the aims and objectives of the PhD. Through reflecting on responses to ASC I have been able to draw conclusions about the impact of the project on art, on perceptions of HIV and on my own artistic practice in relation to my initial research questions.

The first key question for the research was to investigate how a Maximalist aesthetic could reinvent discussions around HIV in the public domain, and shift its repertoire within art. ASC critiqued the existing representational framework for HIV by establishing a Maximalist “counterdiscourse” (Halberstam, 2011, p37) to the prevailing Minimalist one. The installation provided an alternate narrative of HIV to that established by historic figures such as Felix Gonzalez-Torres or contemporary artists such as Prem Sahib. ASC associated HIV with a number of new genres and critical directions that have had an impact on the art world both in terms of how the subject is discussed and how future expectations of what art addressing HIV should look like and how it should function. ASC placed HIV within a broader visual field of references and cultural knowledge than previous artistic contributions by using humour. By contextualising specialist scientific jargon and sexual health messages within mainstream cultural references I was able to educate audiences and popularise subjects, such as chemsex, which have been largely overlooked by contemporary art until now. The “playfulness” (Appendix 3.2, p304) of my treatment of HIV enabled a critique of the narrow repertoire of existing treatments of the subject to develop. Moreover, the material precarity of the installation and the emphasis on aura, which I have categorised as shonkiness, has changed how other artists can address HIV in the future. The installation helped communicate complex scientific ideas to non-specialist audiences using cartoon means. The Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool have subsequently acquired parts of the installation for their permanent

collection as part of a new LGBT collecting programme supported by the Art Fund (Museums and Heritage Advisor, 2016). This means that parts of ASC are now part of a major public art museum and will be exhibited within the gallery and available for other museums to borrow and use as part of further HIV art scholarship.

By adopting a new aesthetic for the representation of HIV, a new public, “an entirely different audience” (Appendix 3.3, p305), was created around the subject. ASC attracted audiences from a wide range of backgrounds because it provided multiple points of entry into the subject using polyvocality, material diversity and carnivalesque. The project combined audiences from art, science, live art, activism, health, virology and government and provided them with a shared space for exchange. In turn this has led to critical dialogues that have gone beyond ASC, which are evidenced through collaborations between other artists and scientists that were involved in the project, notably artist Jordan McKenzie and Doctor Ford Hickson’s collaboration on *Shame Chorus* (ongoing). ASC also provided those familiar with HIV to consider the subject from a variety of new angles. This included considering the social, scientific, cultural, governmental, linguistic and visual factors in relation to one another rather than in isolation. ASC responded to the contemporary understanding of HIV by representing it as a web of interconnected problems. The project used painting to develop a syntax for thinking about HIV in a holistic way. I used layering, collage and drawing to invent pictorial fictions that addressed different parts of the HIV problem simultaneously, making explicit for audiences the links between otherwise hidden aspects of the HIV problem. This had an impact on how audiences considered HIV. One viewer noted that the Maximalist way of representing HIV “honors the complexity of the virus itself” (Appendix 3.4, p306). The visual complexity of the installation and the range of voices used to achieve this were described as a form of “world-building” by another observer (Appendix 3.2, p304).

Live art played an important role in creating a new public for HIV within the installation. The installation transposed methods from live art to fine art in order to challenge prevailing somber representations of HIV. The inclusion of hospitality in the form of a bartender and a fortune-teller engaged audiences to think differently about HIV in novel ways. For example, the names of the bartender, The Chem Jester, and the fortune-teller, Barbara Truvada, were themselves playful conversational starting points for discussions of serious aspects of the HIV question such as chemsex and PrEP. One audience member noted that the installation required “more input and interaction from the viewer” (Appendix 3.1, p303) than previous representations of the subject. This active, exploratory role given to the viewer invited them to ask questions and interrogate the subject. Moreover, the way in which live art was framed within the installation empowered the spectatorship of audiences rather than intimidating it. The jestered way in which performers were dressed enabled audiences to engage in conversations about HIV and to think about the non-live aspects of the installation from new perspectives in ways that has not necessarily been possible in previous artworks addressing HIV. However, consideration of my use of the jester through the lens of Sianne Ngai’s *zanni* (Ngai, 2012) has impact on how I theorise live art within my artistic practice in future. The live aspects of ASC complimented objects within a larger ontological framework. Audiences were able to engage in a variety of more or less active ways depending on the presentational mode of a given artwork. Interactions with live artists helped visitors navigate the exhibition and printed materials giving information about HIV complimented this. The live art strategies extended from Bourriaud’s concept of relational aesthetics (1998) but diverged from it in order to generate new territory for my own artistic practice. ASC showed that I could use my costumes to dress others as my characters rather than relying on myself to perform the roles. The inclusion of actors to play roles that I would have assumed in previous installations has transformed the possibilities within my artistic practice for creating fictional narratives in future live and video projects.

ASC responded to the question of how spatial design could be used to curate an epic installation about HIV by using the leitmotif of the cruise maze. ASC drew on the plans of gay bathhouses not only to develop spatial designs for the installation but also to generate imagery for wallpapers and paintings that were displayed within the exhibition. ASC employed the cruise maze (Prior and Cusack, 2008) as a leitmotif for organising a series of artworks made in a diverse range of media that addressed different aspects of the HIV problem. The layouts of gay bathhouses, saunas, public toilets and adult bookstores informed an architectural narrative for the exhibition that enabled discussion about sexual risk and HIV transmission with audiences. This facilitated a further narrative to develop in relation to HIV about transmission risk and gay male cruising habits regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of the viewer. The exhibition positioned viewers as queer flaneurs (Turner, 2003, p120) within an art cruise maze in which they could explore hundreds of different artworks addressing HIV in their chosen order and at their own pace. Audiences were immersed within the subject as opposed to looking at it from outside. The implication of using spatial design to curate ASC brings into question the role of the curator more broadly in contemporary art and this will need to be addressed by further study. ASC shifted the role of the curator from that of someone who makes choices about which artworks go where to that of an administrator, a mediator between partners and an ambassador for the project. The role that spatial design played in the installation also contributed to new insights into the role that production values play in Maximalism. The use of cardboard, craft badness and precarious materials, which I have termed shonky, contributed to an aesthetic awkwardness that differs from Ngai's discussions in *Our Aesthetic Categories* (Ngai, 2012) and will require future study.

A number of ethical questions were raised during the making of Alien Sex Club. The presence of free rapid HIV testing raised the possibility of what to do should a visitor test positive. This was mitigated by the presence of trained professionals from Terrence Higgins Trust as well as a clear plan that we put in place to safely and quietly escort anyone in distress out of the installation for

counseling and a follow up test to clarify the result Dean Street Clinic. No data was gathered as part of the testing portion of the exhibition. Instead the testing brought realism to the exhibition. My hesitation in the lead up to the installation that this might jar with my aesthetic approach was unfounded since the blue shed in which the testing happened took on the carnivalesque approach to the subject. Tonal conflicts also occurred within the written in my incorporation of autoethnographic accounts of cruising. These sections could have been expanded further in a different iteration of the project. Using personal accounts of cruising and the spaces of cruising gave me first hand experience with which to critique the literature on the subject and form an original response to the subject. Traversing these boundaries of tone, taste and genre became integral to how Alien Sex Club innovated the way in which art-science collaborations are done.

Undertaking Alien Sex Club as a PhD has added greater intellectual rigour and critical scope to my artistic practice than if I had undertaken the project by other means. The PhD has expanded the intellectual basis for what I have done by exposing me to critical situations in which my artistic practice has been positioned against completely different viewpoints. The challenge of discussing my artistic practice in response to the viewpoints of my supervisors helped deepen its intellectual range. By transposing my artistic practice to a range of architectural debates it has lead me along new creative paths that I would not otherwise have encountered and which have generated the possibilities for my subsequent artistic investigations. Furthermore, by staging ASC within an academic context has enabled discussion of HIV to happen in novel ways. One viewer observed of staging ASC at Ambika P3 "I think the work within the space meant that people could reflect in a completely different manner" (Appendix 3.7, p310). Due to the serious nature of the HIV subject and my Maximalist treatment it was important to legitimise the project using academic means. ASC involved a large number of partnerships and collaborations that traversed disciplinary thresholds and hierarchies of taste and value.

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of ASC it has helped establish new intellectual relationships for my artistic practice. ASC has provided an intellectual framework for and a schematic model for other art-science projects, which can be carried out by me and by other people. One of these is my collaboration with Professor Gregory Towers and members of his laboratory at UCL.¹ ASC developed my interest in virology, which has grown into a subsequent project, *CAPSID*, which will be exhibited at CGP in London² and HOME³ in Manchester in 2018 and will subsequently tour to New York in 2019 in collaboration with Visual AIDS.⁴ Working with Towers provides me with new intellectual challenges, new practical challenges in terms of learning software, new imagery and new narratives for my artistic practice. In return I am able to translate complex scientific and cultural ideas into popular and accessible forms, which enable Towers' research to reach a wider audience beyond science and for the narratives that he is generating to be applied to cultural situations other than science. Towers' laboratory is publishing groundbreaking research into the viral capsid of HIV that will have implications on how the next generation of HIV drugs is designed (Jacques et al, 2016). Knowledge about the way the capsid works within the host cell and the mechanical role that the hexamer (hexagonally shaped protein) plays in regulating viral replication will inform a new installation supported by a Large Arts Award from The Wellcome Trust. I will use data generated by Towers and his colleagues about the HIV capsid and apply it to representing how cultural processes are transmitted. This builds directly on my work for ASC but goes in new directions with it, allowing for a whole new range of intellectual and creative possibilities to develop. It is a form of interdisciplinarity particularised by my being an artist. My training as an artist enables me to bring special communication skills to new interdisciplinary relationships such as this. My art training becomes the intermediary through which intellectual exchange can occur. Alien Sex Club demonstrated that artists have an opportunity to address social and scientific subjects in their work as part of a larger cultural process.

¹ <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/towers-lab/>

² <http://cgplondon.org/>

³ <http://homemcr.org/exhibitions/>

⁴ <http://visualaids.org/>

Appendix 1
The Regulation of Sex Establishments

A question of the legality and zoning of sex clubs arose during my research, which this appendix seeks to answer, accompanying chapter 4 “The Spaces of Sex.”

In London today Sex Establishments are regulated by schedule two of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982. There are currently four categories of sex establishments, each category of licensed premises permits the following activities:

- **Sex Shop** - sell, hire, exchange, lend display or demonstrate sex articles or other things that are intended for use in connection with, or for the purpose of stimulating or encouraging sexual activity or acts of force or restraint which are associated with sexual activity.
- **Sex Cinemas** - show films that are primarily for the portrayal of sexual activity or acts of force or restraint, which are associated with sexual activity with the intention of sexually stimulating customers.
- **Sexual Entertainment Venues (SEV)** - provide sexual entertainment (e.g. lap dancing, peep show, live sex show, strip show, etc) to a live audience for financial gain of the organiser or the entertainer.
- **Hostess Bars** - companionship for customers and premises that give the impression that a sexual performance, service, etc is available.¹

After a long phone call to Camden Council Licensing Team I was unable to establish the policy regarding sex clubs and gay bathhouses in the borough and the UK generally. They stated that sex in a sauna could be reported as contravening the license and so I do not know if this means that gay bathhouses are operating illegally or under different auspices. The process of signing one's initials on entering a gay bathhouse of sex club may mean that in 'joining the club' one is a private member and thus the activity is legal and not subject to the regulation of the license. An alcohol license is needed if the establishment wishes to serve such drinks.

The zoning for sex establishments is regulated as follows, from Camden Council Website, April 2014:

Character of relevant localities

The Council has discretion to refuse applications where the grant would be inappropriate having regard to the character of the relevant locality and the use to which any premises in the vicinity are put.

In general, we will treat the ward in which the premises is situated as the relevant locality, although a different view may be taken following representations in individual cases, e.g. where the premises is close to a ward boundary. As for 'vicinity', this will be determined in the circumstances of each case, although as a general guideline a radius of 250 metres will be taken.

In exercising its discretion on these grounds, the Council will take into account the following:

- schools or other facilities frequented by children such as playgrounds and playgroups
- cultural facilities such as museums, theatres and cinemas
- facilities frequented primarily by women such as well woman clinics
- places of worship
- public leisure facilities such as leisure centres, parks and open spaces
- community buildings such as community centres, libraries and drop in centres
- places used by vulnerable persons such as hostels and other adult social care facilities
- residential premises
- hospitals and other medical facilities
- other sex establishments

The premises to be licensed will be considered to be 'in the vicinity' of other premises where those other premises are situated within a 250m radius of the premises that are the subject of the application. Whether the premises are within

250 metres of sensitive premises or not, the licensing panel shall also consider other factors outlined in the policy.

Limit on appropriate number of sex establishments

For the purposes of the policy, each ward has been determined to be a locality. The Council has considered the nature of its wards and determined that a presumption exists that any application for a sex establishment license in any of Camden's wards shall be refused, save for in exceptional circumstances.

The presumption to refuse shall not apply to:

- the renewal or variation of an existing sex establishment license; or
- the grant of a new sex establishment license during the transitional period 1 November 2011 to 31 October 2012 to operators that can demonstrate that during the 12 months prior to the commencement of the transitional period they have been regularly providing sexual entertainment in premises that previously fell to be licensed only under the Licensing Act 2003.

Other considerations

In all cases, other factors we will consider when determining applications are:

- proximity to sensitive premises
- the nature of any logo for the sex establishment
- the nature of any external images or advertisements at the sex establishment
- whether advertising inside the sex establishment can be viewed from outside
- whether the name of the sex establishment clearly indicates the nature of the activities that take place there
- whether the times the sex establishment is open coincide with the times relevant nearby premises are used
- queuing arrangements for persons wishing to gain admission to the sex establishment
- whether planning consent exists for the proposed use
- whether there are any planned developments in the area that may render the locality unsuitable for a sex establishment
- any comments received from persons about the grant of the license

- whether the applicant has had any enforcement action taken against them by the Police, the Council or other bodies such as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Revenue and Customs
- whether the applicant is able to comply with the standard conditions applicable to all sex establishments and any special conditions the Council may consider appropriate to apply to that particular sex establishment license
- accessibility to the premises for disabled persons

¹ Available at <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sex-establishment-categories> [Accessed 14 June 2016].

Appendix 2
Responses to Alien Sex Club in Reviews

Responses to Alien Sex Club were gathered in the lead up to and during the exhibition at Ambika P3 in London and used for analysis. I have highlighted the areas that are quoted in the chapter. From a total 15 reviews of the London exhibition 8 reviews were selected (Art Newspaper, Creative Review, Facebook, Hyperallergic, i-D Magazine, Artdependence, Monocle Radio, Guardian guide) and 7 were omitted because either they copied the press release or they were interviews directly with me and so I deemed them not to be usable for analysis since I had voiced them directly (So So Gay, Culture on the offensive, Homotopia TV, Whitstable Biennial blog and London Live TV, Pocko, Artnet).

2.1 The Art Newspaper

The Buck Stopped Here: Alien Sex Club goes underground in Marylebone

Louisa Buck

27th July 2015

The vast subterranean site of Ambika P3 on Marylebone Road, London, has been transformed into artist John Walter's Alien Sex Club (until 14 August). The mind-boggling, tragi-comic extravaganza—loosely taking its “cruise maze” format from the layouts of sex clubs and gay saunas—attracted all ages and sexual tendencies at its packed opening last Thursday (23 July). The broad appeal was entirely appropriate as this polymorphous event—devised by Walter in conjunction with Alison Rodger, HIV specialist and researcher at University College London—has a serious and important side, having been designed to use every means and medium imaginable to address the complex subject of sexual health.

There was brisk business for gins and tonics at the Capsid Club, based on the form of the protein shell—or capsid—of the HIV virus, with further computer-generated virus “heads” appearing throughout the labyrinthine installation, whether in paintings, 3D prints and even as a giant puce inflatable pug virus. There were more queues for special tarot readings with cards featuring images

ranging from EastEnders heroine Dot Cotton to the Chrysler and Empire State buildings tucked up as The Lovers. (However, there was a distinct lack of takers among the party crowd for the rapid HIV testing on offer in a blue-painted replica of a garden shed played in by the artist as a child.)

Funny and deathly serious collide throughout a programme of specially scheduled events along with exhibits such as a series of psychedelic videos populated by eccentrically-clad protagonists—including the artist—communing in “garbled, Grindr-infused post-Polari” on subjects revolving around the various hazards surrounding sexual transmission. There is a sobering series of coffins commemorating well-known figures such as Keith Haring, Kenny Everett and David Wojnarowicz who died of AIDS-related illnesses, as well as a more cheerily charming set of marrow sculptures each wearing hats knitted by the artist’s mother, satirizing “condom fatigue” and available for visitors to carry around the show. And let’s hope one of the plethora of property developers currently readjusting the capital’s skyline is inspired to erect Walter’s Prostate Palace: “the male g-spot transformed into a new architectural landmark for London.”

2.2 Creative Review

Welcome to the Alien Sex Club

Eliza Williams

16th July 2015

Artist John Walter creates exuberant, 'maximalist' art installations packed full of imagery, ideas and live performances, usually centred around a bar. His latest show, Alien Sex Club, which opens at Ambika P3 gallery in London next week, tackles a serious subject – HIV and sexual health testing – but with a smile. Inspired by a mix of everything from gay sex clubs to cabaret theatre, Grindr to HIV, Alien Sex Club is a large-scale art installation by Walter, which will be on show at Ambika P3 Gallery in July and August and later this year at the Homotopia Festival in Liverpool.

At the centre of the space is a 'cruise maze' – a structure common to sex clubs and gay saunas – which will lead viewers through the exhibition, where they can view paintings, sculptures and video artworks and also visit a bar and have their Tarot read. The idea for the installation was first sparked by Walter's excursions to gay clubs in London and the heightened performance of these experiences – "you go in, put all your clothes in a bag and pay £5 and you're just wearing your shoes and socks and you're walking around and then it's just a free-for-all," he says – and, in an arty echo of these clubs, there will be opportunities for visitors to take part in the work, or be a voyeur.

Fear not though, for while a strong element of performance is central to the work – Walter wants viewers to feel that they are entering a world, and be fully immersed into it – the intention is not to intimidate or make people uncomfortable. In fact, quite the opposite – Walter uses performance to be hospitable and spark conversations. The bartenders will act as semi-guides for the exhibition, for example, with visitors encouraged to hang out and chat. "If you say that there is a performance going on, people worry," says Walter. "Then when they get to it, they realise I'm not naked and there's not some awful body piercing thing going on, and that actually they're being offered a drink and a cake. Then they're enjoying themselves, which is when you've got them in the palm of your hand – that's when you can do the work."

The work, for Walter, is about the communication of his ideas, which include an exploration into our contemporary attitudes towards sexual health, specifically HIV, and also questions about the art world and its quirks and limitations. Walter has worked with Dr Alison Rodger, a lecturer at UCL London and a specialist in HIV, in his research for Alien Sex Club, and the exhibition will include free rapid HIV testing, hosted by the Terrence Higgins Trust. While there is a strong element of humour and cheekiness to much of Walter's work, the testing is presented seriously and with respect, and with it Walter sees the exhibition extending into political activism. "It felt right to do it here, because it's what the

show is talking about it and it seemed like we should talk about it upfront," he says.

Part of the point of including the testing is to normalise it. "It will be very different for different audiences," Walter explains. "For gay men in London it's a very normal thing, but maybe not to do it in that context. It's not something you can view other people doing, it's done privately and it's managed by THT. The purpose isn't to get somebody testing positive, the purpose is to normalise people to the idea of testing because that's the best way of reducing the spread of the virus. It has to be about going to the dentist, you just do it to check."

Alien Sex Club is at Ambika P3 Gallery in London from July 24–August 14, and Homotopia Festival in Liverpool from October 30–December 1. aliensexclub.com

2.3 Facebook

Guy Burch

24th July 2015

Last night I went to the opening of John Walter's Alien Sex Club at the Ambika P3 gallery opposite Bakers Street tube. The huge basement space is filled with his installation that mimics a cruise maze, the kind of anonymous dark room complex found in sex clubs and saunas. Utilising the props and elements of past exhibitions as well as new works, it is an attempt to engage with HIV and contemporary issues around sexual behaviour. Walter has worked with Dr Alison Rodger, a lecturer at UCL London and a specialist in HIV, in his research for Alien Sex Club, and the exhibition will include free rapid HIV testing, hosted by the Terrence Higgins Trust (in a mad customised garden shed). His presentation is pitched somewhere in the realm of pantomime, absurdist theatre, radical drag and agit-prop. I have an in-built prickly response to work that deals with HIV either as an 'interesting issue' or a conceptual topic often involving focusing on biological substances (microscope slides of blood and semen etc). It is a very easy target for artists to hitch a ride on the sexy, unsafe, sex and death

bandwagon. My problem is that having seen most of my friends from the 1980s die horribly, and knowing that the virus is a pain in the butt to live with, I get very irritated when the very human concerns (loss, grief, fear) and day to day the tedium of hospital visits, the telling people, the medication, are ignored or made sterile. I also know that the old Safer Sex arguments don't work in an age of AIDS as a manageable condition (in the West at least).

I went to John's show with some trepidation then, especially having checked him out online before and found an apparently frivolous and heavily ironic engagement with his subjects (there is a very funny video of his playing with Jasper John and Robert Rauchenberg's closet relationship and 'high art' status - see www.johnwalter.net/). In fact the inventiveness bowled me over. He appears to be attempting to subvert received manners and perceptions, whether they involve 'fine' arts, sexuality, polite society or throw away sex and culture via ridiculous and ridiculing play. He says his process is "a channelling of social anthropology and psychoanalysis; investigating in either direction the macrocosm of the world outside and the microcosm of my internal world". He has some relation to figures such as Grayson Perry, Leigh Bowery, David Hoyle and Duggie Fields (Fields has made similar absurdist video about consumer culture) and to Gilbert & George's deliberate provocations of societies moralistic positions. I'm not sure he always stays on the right side of respect for the lived experience of the kind of people he is making part of his theatre (me for instance). There is a danger of lampooning those who are actually victims, making them seem buffoons for making mistakes in a difficult world. But he is absolutely right in having a pop at, and disrespecting the stereotypical roles we end up playing on the scene with the commercial pigeonholing of 'types' often backed by throw-away celebrity and vanity obsessed consumer culture. He seems to be trying to suggest we resist joining flocks and do our own thing. A sort of 'you have to laugh or you'd cry' approach to the absurdities and indignity of life. The PWA's I knew who are now dead called it gallows humor... and it was.

His watercolours, a sort of Rakes Progress meets Gulliver's Travels, are particularly good. If you have read Joe Orton's 'Head to Toe' it has a very similar

feel and indeed Halliwell and Orton's mischievous defacing of library books to attack (straight) moral conventions set the kind of tone he uses. Elsewhere there were rather good paintings, prints, 3D printed virus monsters, hand made books and costumes. Actually that is one criticism: perhaps rather difficult to perceive how good they are in the general carnival here. I'd have to say he would be high on my list for a Turner Prize nomination.

It's the Mad Hatter let loose in fairy land. Go see!

2.4 Hyperallergic

Ryan J Simons

8th May 2014

Alien Sex Club, an installation by John Walter set for the University of Westminster's Ambika P3 opening in July 2015, will seek to promote the idea of a safe, informative physical space to act as a buffer between the smart phone dating app and the physical experience of a sexual encounter. Borne from a previous idea, Kings Cross £4 Sex Klubb, this new iteration looks to design a "cruise maze" full of paintings, drawings, sculptures, performance pieces, music, video, hospitality, fortune-telling, and rapid HIV testing centers. Walter's project begins with a simple — yet fraught — question: Can we reduce rates of HIV transmission using architecture?

According to Walter, Alien Sex Club is a direct response to the perceived lack of visibility of HIV within contemporary art and architecture.

Aside from the retrospective view of looking at the virus as a "historical subject," Walter looks to create a complete sensory immersive experience in order to create an architecture that can promote a level of safety within the seemingly risky environment:

“I have been driven by my experience of gay sex clubs, saunas and bathhouses to examine the nature of the space and the types of behavior that they house. I am interested in the ‘cruise maze’ as one of several phenomena within the sex club facilitating a space in which a parallel society exists. I wanted to get to grips with where this had come from and what we could learn about it. It is a spatial form that suggests a way of organizing the full breadth of my oeuvre.”

In “The Breached Wall,” Herbert Muschamp’s 1988 review of the Architectural League of New York’s “Vacant Lots” exhibit in *The New Republic*, Muschamp writes at length about a project designed to house homeless New Yorkers living with HIV and AIDS. He sums up the efforts in one basic statement:

“Your work is what defines the shape of the place you occupy in the cultural scheme of things. It is that place you want to dedicate to the resolution of this crisis. “

Walter, in collaboration with Dr. Alison Rodger, is looking to not only Kickstart a stalled conversation, but aims to use art and architecture as a driving force to reimagine the conversation in terms of safely and openly participate in a space that has shed the rigid image we often associate with the laboratory and takes on a fluidity of not only spatial manifestation, but a fluidity of programmatic intensity. In Walter’s words:

“The project is bigger than just the installation in the sense that it is a vehicle for discussion and debate before, during, and after the installation (a website will live on as an archive and a subsequent iteration of the maze). Yes, Alison’s specialist knowledge of HIV and standing in the medical community lends weight to the project. However, it’s a partnership that has grown out of my need to know more about HIV and ART and her need to disseminate her research to a wider audience. “

Architecture is constantly inventing, reinventing, denying, or embracing the notion of crisis. Whether it is a crisis of professional identity, social

responsibility, or representation every moment of stagnation is multiplied by the speed of the world in which we live. A project like Alien Sex Club removes itself from the discussion by focusing on a tangible crisis. While architecture is used to bring HIV into focus, it steps back and acts as a canvas instead of the subject.

Alien Sex Club, Ambika P3, John Walter

2.5 i-D Magazine

Charlotte Gush

29th July 2015

Welcome to John Walter's Alien Sex Club

A new art show opening today rejects 80s-style activism to positively address the increasing rates of HIV in the UK.

Gay cruising saunas and sex clubs that were closed by law during the AIDS crisis in the 80s and 90s have inspired a new art show by British multimedia artist John Walter. Alien Sex Club, which opens today at Ambika P3 gallery, explores the relationship between visual culture and HIV by way of a "cruise maze" architectural installation that features painting, video, sculpture and performance, and also offers HIV testing to visitors, in partnership with the Terence Higgins Trust.

"The exhibition aims to use art as a way of addressing increasing rates of HIV diagnosis in gay men in the UK and open up a discussion about that," Walters told i-D. Alien Sex Club seeks, "to update the discourse about art being a political tool by doing activism in a new way, not the 80s way," Walter says, explaining that, "because HIV has changed in that time due to changes in treatment and the (in)visibility of HIV - I'm using a maximalist aesthetic to look at HIV as a web of interconnecting problems, whereas artists like Felix Gonzalez Torres were using a minimalist aesthetic to address it earlier in the AIDS crisis.

Though the cruising saunas and clubs have closed down, apps like Grindr, Hornet and Scruff have taken their place, and there is still an appetite to meet strangers for sex, despite the risks. If the show represents a new activism, what is its message? "There's not a message as such," says Walter: "The show is a completely immersive, colour saturated, playful world. The HIV testing is an extension of my use of hospitality and suggests to people that testing should be less scary and taboo and that people should take the responsibility to know their HIV status and act accordingly to help reduce the spread of the virus... but it's not preachy or 'educational'."

Alien Sex Club is at Ambika P3 in London until 14 August. The show opens in Liverpool 30 October - 1 December 2015 at Homotopia Festival.

2.6 Artdependence

Mark Sheerin

31st July 2015

An Alien Sex Club for all: interview with John Walter

Those who like adventure with their art are currently well served at Ambika P3, that vast space for the University of Westminster in North London. Visitors follow bright signs to a sex club, indeed an Alien Sex Club. Passing through a towering veil of coloured organza, you are then invited to lose yourself in an array of boarded passages and darkened cells.

It is more maze than gallery, and yet there is art at every turn. Artist John Walter has put a psychedelic twist on the visual language of virology. He creates fiendish infectious agents from inflatables and plastic dough. Slogans on the walls hint at the erotic; NSFW videos in secluded bowers confirm this suspicion, while a pulsing soundtrack adds to the impression you are somehow inside a body, in the manner of 1966 sci-fi film *Fantastic Voyage*.

“The syntax of the show is the maze,” says Walter, speaking on the phone. Which means this exhibition is structured by a cruising playground of the sort more usually found in gay sex clubs. The artist has brought the cruise maze out of the shadows and into the faces of visitors of all orientations and levels of convention.

“This has started off with my own personal interest in these spaces and my own personal experience,” explains the artist, for whom the cruise maze provokes three hard-to-fathom questions: “What the hell this is, and why it’s like that, why has it grown up as a form?”

In a gallery context for perhaps the first time, the maze points to a promiscuity of looking, which may be the whole story of art.

“I’m always trying to get new things into the vocabulary of art and that’s through shoving things together and seeing if they can join,” says Walter. Indeed, so much has been put together to bring us this show that the vision is cosmic, though the artist is more keen to use linguistic terms. So a set of bespoke tarot cards are a “lexicon” rather than an occult portal.

A character called Barbara Truvada, inhabited by a qualified performance artist, reads tarot for visitors and shares some of that lexicon. My question for Barbara was around the future for her creator and, after turning up several cards with references to recreational drug use, she diplomatically suggests that John Walter is ‘addicted’ to making artwork.

Looking round at the illustrative murals, the giant sketchbooks, the cardboard sculpture, the gin bar, and the clownish costumes, this claim seems hard to dispute. Alien Sex Club has been three years in the making, a collaboration with a team of five artists and some half a dozen scientists, chiefly Dr Alison Rodger from UCL. Scientists, you may wonder. Well, yes in fact.

The colours may be bright and the welcome warm, but there is a darker side to this epic installation. As antiretroviral drugs have taken some of the fear away from AIDS, recent years have seen a rise in HIV infections among gay men. Along with the world's first art cruise maze, Walter sets another precedent with an sculptural but fully operational rapid testing clinic for HIV.

Sex club design, drug fuelled 'chemsex' parties, the use of cruising apps like Grindr; these reference points are somewhat beyond this writer's experience. But despite dealing with a self-described alien lifestyle, this is a welcoming, accessible and quite innocent show.

"This isn't aimed at one particular audience," says Walter. "It talks about a subject from a certain angle, but everybody is invited to this and everybody has a use for this." Mind you, the thirtysomething artist, who is charm itself, has a warning: "I want that friendliness to be the lure for you". Whatever precautions you take, Alien Sex Club could get under your skin.

Alien Sex Club can be seen at Ambika P3, London, until August 14 2015. It travels to Homotopia Festival in Liverpool between October 30 and December 1 2015.

2.7 Transcript of Monocle Radio Arts Review

Episode 111

3rd August 2015

Curator Francesca Gavin talks to Robert Bound

Robert Bound: Francesca Gavin, welcome as ever to the Arts Review and you have an interesting bag of tricks up your sleeve...if you could...shall we mix some more metaphors during the next 15 minutes?

Francesca Gavin: Yes, tonnes of metaphors mixed together...

RB: ...all over the place... Before we get onto the fantastically named Alien Sex Club, and this is not a loaded question, these two questions are not related; how the devil are you?

FG: I'm very very well

RB: Fantastic. You've been all over the place.

FG: I have. I'm about to do a big curation job in Berlin and I'm about to go out to Copenhagen [*lifts voice in questioning intonation*] in two weeks for chart, the art fair there that I'm doing a performance programme and a video programme and a print programme and...enjoying the joys of Copenhagen.

RB: What kind of pair of shoes do you need in order to do all these things at high velocity? Do you have a specific kind of art shoe?

FG: I'm a shoe in a bag kind of girl. So in the same way as you have clutch bags...I have day and night outfits, it involves a lot of black...

RB: OK, so it's just like one layer on one layer off? You're ready to roll..

FG: You got it, you got it

RB: Shall we talk about the Alien Sex Club?

FG: mmm let's [*gleeful sound – voice gets higher*]

FG: So basically it's August in the artworld, which is an art no-man's land. You either get blockbuster shows or you get really, strange fun things. So I've bought you three hilarious, weird, fun things

RB: I've loved doing some image research

FG: Yes, it's hilarious. So Alien Sex Club, the name is a metaphor take on a very famous Goth band, according to my artist friend Scott Trelevan, who I just went and saw the show with. It is basically a crazy, weird installation that fuses drawings and digital kind of animation and weird sheds and performance work and its kind of fluoro meets naive meets cardboard and its all about our relationship to AIDS, but in a brilliant way

RB: and in a really witty, not the big grey tombstone that scared people in the 80's this is taking it to some phenomenal extra dimension

FG: It's really interesting cos it's a subject that was obviously hugely important, particularly in the 80's and the 90's in contemporary art, and in contemporary culture, and then it's really disappeared from the conversation and I think this show does a brilliant job of making a really fun, very very British, kind of mental, trance-rave combination look at what our relationship to that is. I mean they have like a pop up, they have doctors there, where you can have really fast HIV tests, within the context of also having... I had a tarot card read, and one of my tarot cards was chlamydia – it was kind of, it was hilarious! It's kind of witty and funny and makes it seem something that you can learn about in a really accessible way but also is a valid artwork, in its own sense.

RB: I mean this is at the Ambika P3, which is round the corner from our studios here at Monocle, um and I love that space, it often gets used... I often trek down there during Frieze week I suppose...

FG: ...for the Sunday art fair

RB: ...yeah, it's when the Sunday art fair's on. And it's a really nice space, walking down there it sort of you could do lots of different things with that space. This show seems like it's a bit of a journey – you go through weird tunnels and what, it's called a cruising maze?

FG: Yeah, it's basically like a cardboard version of dark rooms

RB: sounds like the Crystal Maze but with a strange kind of sexual ethic

FG: It's not like going to Berghain and disappearing in some like...

RB: It sounds a bit like it might be

FG: Yeah but it's much more like kind of playful. It is quite Crystal Maze out of cardboard dressed in, kind of covered in like fluoro bobbles, kind of –it's very playful and it's kind of got that kind of British DIY children's television vibe about it

RB: oh really yes, it does seem like that it seems a bit Choc-a-bloc, or a bit like the test card, a bit like a really strange, eery version of the test card, or maybe a very witty version of it?

FG: Yes very much so, a quite early 90's version of it

RB: Um, so John Walter is the artist...

FG: uh-huh!

RB: um and it seems like one of those things, do you get the idea that when you're walking through it that there is one artist's imagination at work, cos it seems, just from what I've read around it that it's almost its it feels like a sort of group show of stuff?

FG: You really feel, even though there are collaborative performance elements in particular, you really feel like it's a specific artist's aesthetic, if nothing else, because he's very much into exploring a repetition of these kind of fluoro colours, these kind of blobby, almost virus shaped characters. It's very much like a certain person's point of view but it feels like something much more

conversational in that sense. But you really feel like it's one person gone wild being given a strange space under a car park

RB: So, this is site specific? This is all made for this? And it'll maybe trot around the world somewhere else? ...possibly in some other sort of form?

FG: There's some very funny editions that you can get including sort of these foam marrows with little tea cosies on them and of course the tarot cards

RB: Did you get anything? Did you get a marrow tea cosy?

FG: I haven't got space for a marrow tea cosy myself but it's beautiful

RB: neither literally nor metaphorically has Francesca Gavin got space for a marrow tea cosy. I want to talk to you about one of his works, which is called 'strange positioning' 2014 by John Walter, it's the image there at the top. To paint a picture for our listeners it's a bit like, if people at home might want to Google Harrison Ford's Halloween costume from a couple of years ago – he went as a pod of peas

FG: *laughs*

RB: as a human pod of peas, and it looks a bit like that – strange one - and he's playing with AIDS and with the virus and the whole rest of it

FG: Yeah it was a big kind of cushiony thing with different multi-coloured...you know the bobbles you get on top of Christmas, of like winter woolly hats?

RB: yeah

FG: It was that but in like a cushion form as a take on our relationship to the medical and science, which I think is so whacky and out there and listen, technically this is not the most sophisticated show you'll go and see but it's

definitely fresh and it's definitely feeling like a certain person's voice and if nothing else, just alone for getting people to (a) feel comfortable taking an HIV test not in a clinic environment or even have the discussion about that I think it's really positive.

RB: And is it a kind of is it a hands-on show? I mean are people being invited to touch things? Brush past things? Squeeze the bobble on the...?

FG: Well I had my tarot cards read...

RB: ...yeah you're right

FG: There's a bar there where you can have gin and tonics while you watch things. It's not too touchy. It's not as like you're feeling your way through a weird sex maze but it feels tactile without being touchy...if that makes sense?

RB: I like it. That was Alien Sex Club. The artist is John Walter. The venue is Ambika P3 on the Marylebone Road in London and that is on until the 14th August.

2.8 The Guardian Guide

Skye Sherwin

July 24th 2015

John Walter, London

If only all art with an educational mission promised as much fun as Alien Sex Club, tackling HIV and its place in popular culture with fortune tellers, zany cartoons, psychedelic wallpaper and suggestive vegetables in hats. Walter's sculptures, paintings, videos and performances, born from research with UCL's HIV specialist Dr Alison Rodger, are housed in a "cruise maze", a setting for sexual discovery in gay clubs and saunas. Throughout, Walter's treatment of the

issues is determinedly playful and current. His tarot pack, for instance, includes figures such as Breaking Bad's Walter White, a reference to "chemsex", one of the recent big risks for transmission among gay men.

Ambika P3, NW1, to Friday 14 August

Appendix 3
Responses to Alien Sex Club in Interviews

This appendix accompanies chapter 7, which analyses responses to Alien Sex Club. Interviews were carried out in August and September 2015, after the installation at Ambika P3, with a small group of people who had been involved in the project in order to gather their responses to the show and analyse them.

Interviews with 12 participants were sought of which 11 responded. Participants were chosen based on their relationship to the ASC project; these included artists and scientists who were collaborators on events, audience members, invigilators and performers who had done tarot reading or bar tending during the exhibition: Dr Alison Rodger, clinical epidemiologist in infectious diseases and HIV researcher at UCL, scientific partner for Wellcome Trust grant; Jordan McKenzie, performance artist and lecturer at Camberwell College of Art – event collaborator; Dr Ford Hickson, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine – event collaborator; David Stuart, specialist on substance use at Dean Street sexual health clinic, London – event collaborator; Harry Clayton Wright who performed as tarot reader Barbara Truvada; Susannah Hewlett who performed as tarot reader Barbara Truvada – also event collaborator; Ash Ferlito who performed as bar tender The Chem Jester; Amy Ruhl who performed as bar tender The Chem Jester; Marie Rousseau, HIV tester from Terrence Higgins Trust; Lauren Cannell, art student and head invigilator; Charlotte Keenan, curator The Walker Art Gallery Liverpool; and Anna McNally, University of Westminster archivist and audience member. The non-respondent to the interview was a museum curator who had taken a keen interest in the project from its inception; she stated that she had been too busy to participate but wanted to; she never responded within the time frame available. Interviews were carried out in the form of a questionnaire conducted by email comprising 8 questions that sought to measure individuals' relationship to HIV and visual art discourse prior to ASC and afterwards. Other questions sought to gather observations from the installation about audience responses and behaviour. Due to the nature of the project being an analysis of responses to something that I had made there are multiple questions about neutrality and scientific objectivity.

I chose to eliminate the independent curator as an interview participant based on her close knowledge of the project and of my theoretical investigations.

3.1 Dr. Alison Rodger, scientific collaborator.

1. Who in your experience came to ASC?

Appeared to appeal to a wide range of society: students, older people, gay and straight people. People who work in the field of HIV and in other fields.

2. What did people say to you about ASC before / during / after their visit? (please clarify the context in which their comments were made)

Talked mainly to academic and clinical staff who visited the exhibition. All were hugely excited about the concepts behind the exhibition and the way that John had interpreted them.

3a. What was your initial response to ASC?

Very positive, overwhelmed by Johns talent, drive, vision and all that he had achieved. Every bit of art in this very large and diverse exhibition was created by John. Very pleased to see current issues in HIV being made so accessible for an audience not involved in the field or aware of latest research in the area.

3b. What was your reflective response to ASC?

Remains the same. Interested in how art can inform in a way that we often struggle to do through our routine routes of communication as academics. Feel privileged to have been a small part of the ASC and work with John.

4. How do you think ASC differs from other representations of HIV in the arts that you are aware of?

Requires more input and interaction from the viewer. It is not a passive experience. Interpretations are multiple and though guided by the ASC are different for everyone depending on their own life experiences and experiences of the virus. Some aspects very poignant especially for those who have known people who have suffered and died from the virus.

5. What do you think the effect of staging the project in an art gallery had on the discussion of HIV as opposed to the usual spaces it is discussed in such as medical clinics?

It was novel and had impact. Made it non-hierarchical, as the transfer of information from clinic staff to the 'patient' can sometimes feel. Was collaborative where everyone experienced it in their own way.

6. What effect has ASC had on your work?

Made me think more about how we disseminate our work, how it can be perceived, how we need fresh new approaches to reach people

7. Do you have any other observations or comments about Alien Sex Club?

It is truly groundbreaking work.

3.2 Amy Ruhl, performer ASC.

1. Who in your experience came to ASC?

Students, artists, and gay men.

2. What did people say to you about ASC before / during / after their visit? (please clarify the context in which their comments were made)

While working at the bar, many people asked about specific components of the installation. I often asked how people were enjoying it and many responded that they liked it, that it was a lot to take in. A few people said they “didn’t understand it.” One person said that they liked it more and more as they looked at it.

3a. What was your initial response to ASC?

My initial response was that it was a lot of work to process and I knew that it would take some time to put the pieces together. However, I immediately responded positively to the colors, the lay out, and the overall aesthetic of the piece. I also have known the artist throughout the process, so could immediately recognize some of the elements of the piece.

3b. What was your reflective response to ASC?

I think the piece is very intelligent and successful. The maze structure, the “risk” and the matter of choice the viewer experiences while navigating the installation are brilliantly tied to the content of HIV and cruising. I also really admire and relate to the aesthetic approach the artist took to subject matter—marrying a childlike, color ridden style to content that is very serious and dark. I think it was quite a risk, but well worth it. (more on this approach below)

4. How do you think ASC differs from other representations of HIV in the arts that you are aware of?

I think it differs aesthetically in terms of the amount of playfulness applied to the subject matter. The use of various characters and the world-building involved is unlike anything I’ve seen related to the subject.

5. What do you think the effect of staging the project in an art gallery had on the discussion of HIV as opposed to the usual spaces it is discussed in such as medical clinics?

I think it brings it to a larger audience. I also think that it reinvigorates a subject matter that many people think is no longer relevant.

6. What effect has ASC had on your work?

ASC has inspired me to take more risks within my own work, and to see the benefit of working on a project for as long as Walter worked on ASC. I experienced the kind of amazing ideas that can only formulate out of mass amounts of work and thought that come together to create not just a “piece,” but a whole world.

7. Do you have any other observations or comments about Alien Sex Club?

Bring it to New York! This discussion needs to be reinvigorated in the States as well, where we have (unfortunately) been fed the idea that the AIDS epidemic is over.

3.3 Anna McNally, archivist at University of Westminster.

1. Who in your experience came to ASC?

I visited 3 times and saw mostly people aged 20-35. I also saw a number of people tweeting that they had visited the exhibition, many of whom do not seem to regularly visit art galleries.

2. What did people say to you about ASC before / during / after their visit? (please clarify the context in which their comments were made)

Both on twitter and in person, many of the comments about the exhibition all mentioned the scale and sheer amount of work within it. Discussing it with my husband afterwards, we both commented on the number of art historical and pop cultural references within the works. I also visited with my colleagues who aren't regular gallery visitors and the pop cultural references really helped give them a way in to understand the work.

3a. What was your initial response to ASC?

Overwhelming! There was so much to see and I was really keen to understand how all the components fitted together as I knew how much research had gone into it. I thought the gallery handout really helped explain how all the different elements related to the theme and one another.

3b. What was your reflective response to ASC?

I thought it was a really stimulating unthreatening space in which to discuss a very serious topic. Having grown up in the 1980s, while I like to think I don't have those misconceptions about the transmission of the disease that were bandied around then, my perceptions around its management, treatment and eventual course are very much shaped by the large number of deaths of artists and cultural figures from AIDS as I was growing up, and films like Philadelphia. So the exhibition really changed my perceptions.

4. How do you think ASC differs from other representations of HIV in the arts that you are aware of?

As previously mentioned, my main association with HIV in the arts has been around deaths from AIDS, and of seeing it treated as very much a serious, sad topic, and as a death sentence, not as a disease with an ongoing management strategy and potential future treatments.

5. What do you think the effect of staging the project in an art gallery had on the discussion of HIV as opposed to the usual spaces it is discussed in such as medical clinics?

Attracted an entirely different audience and helped to change preconceptions around its management and prognosis.

6. What effect has ASC had on your work?

It's always really interesting to see how researchers take data and re-present it to the public in a new form so it's helped me to think more widely about architecture and science and how the two can be connected, and to try to be a bit more interdisciplinary in my own work.

7. Do you have any other observations or comments about Alien Sex Club?

This was a really great cross-disciplinary project that thoroughly deserved all the publicity and plaudits it received.

3.4 Ash Ferlito, performer ASC.

1. Who in your experience came to ASC?

An excitingly diverse crowd, including but certainly not limited to, people from the medical community, artists, tourists, gay people, straights, young, old, strangers, family and friends. In my experience remarkably inquisitive people came to ASC. I was so heartened by the degree of curiosity exhibited by visitors, people really seemed to want to know what was going on, they asked questions and were open to having an experience.

2. What did people say to you about ASC before / during / after their visit? (please clarify the context in which their comments were made)

I was serving hospitality and gin as the 'Chem Jester' in the Capsid Club, lucky me, and I found that most often people were initially stunned by the magnitude of the project, an appreciation of the sophistication of the content came next and then the longer people stayed the more the layers of meaning and subject matter were revealed.

3a. What was your initial response to ASC?

I was impressed with the 'realness' within the fantasy through a frank discussion of sexual practices and health data. I also was initially aware of the many opportunities the artist created to encourage a real experience from the visitors. The tarot, the bar, the marrows, the HIV testing hut and of course the visual work being presented as a maze-one has to engage with the work simply by walking through the space.

3b. What was your reflective response to ASC?

The importance of hospitality. I was also reflectively aware of the openness of the visitors. I was totally amazed at the willingness of viewers to spend long amounts of time in the exhibition, share very personal stories with me and also- and perhaps most remarkably the genuine curiosity that prompted all kinds of wonderful conversations.

4. How do you think ASC differs from other representations of HIV in the arts that you are aware of?

Often the handling of the subject is done so with one note or mood, in ASC the solemnity of the subject is certainly present but it is imbedded, there are many notes, which I believe truly honors the complexity of life with, in and around the virus, it actual honors the complexity of the virus itself.

5. What do you think the effect of staging the project in an art gallery had on the discussion of HIV as opposed to the usual spaces it is discussed in such as medical clinics?

Viewing a discussion through the lens of art or in the space of the gallery maximizes the content in several ways: 1. it allow for an expansion of meaning for people fluent in the facts but light on or simply not experienced with the human aspects of the data, which is to say scientists can sometimes understand the technical aspects of something without totally grasping the spirit of the subject. 2. Art especially ASC can disarm people, distract people, occupy ones cognitive responses to things long enough for a new meaning or understanding to be delivered. 3. People accustomed to viewing art, which can be very one way experience or cold, were prompted to engage in a way which in my experience is atypical. 4. And perhaps most obviously, staging the project in an art gallery expands the diversity of the audience.

6. What effect has ASC had on your work?

It has made me more interested in community and conversation.

7. Do you have any other observations or comments about Alien Sex Club?

I thought it was very successful and I loved being a part of it.

3.5 David Stuart, scientific collaborator.

1. Who in your experience came to ASC?

I attended ASC on 3 occasions; I saw healthcare professionals and academics from the GUM/HIV fields, as well as members of the general public, mostly represented by gay men and artists.

2. What did people say to you about ASC before / during / after their visit? (please clarify the context in which their comments were made)

Context was general discussion while viewing installation. People communicate to me their enjoyment, curiosity and the importance of the work; also the creative mix of epidemiology and art.

3a. What was your initial response to ASC?

Colorful delight

3b. What was your reflective response to ASC?

The effectiveness of communicating health messages in artistic form, with effect of engaging different people representing different interests/fields of work in topics they might not have reflected on a great deal.

4. How do you think ASC differs from other representations of HIV in the arts that you are aware of?

It was more abstract than most representations of HIV in the arts, facilitating greater scope for reflection and interpretation.

5. What do you think the effect of staging the project in an art gallery had on the discussion of HIV as opposed to the usual spaces it is discussed in such as medical clinics?

This staging allowed for more interpretation than education, which was welcomed and effective.

6. What effect has ASC had on your work?

Inspired me to resource the arts to engage people in HIV awareness.

7. Do you have any other observations or comments about Alien Sex Club?

No. Thank you to John Walter.

3.6 Dr. Ford Hickson, scientific collaborator.

1. Who in your experience came to ASC?

People interested in HIV, people interested in pop art and visual culture, my mates, arty types, fags, fag hags.

At the Let's Talk about Gay Sex and Drugs session there were a load of people I'd expect to see in a bar.

2. What did people say to you about ASC before / during / after their visit? (please clarify the context in which their comments were made)

Wow – what a lot of work. This is weird.

My mates who were there for Come to My Party...Loads of Charlie enjoyed it; some were moved, some were bemused, some were amused.

3a. What was your initial response to ASC?

When I first heard about it I thought: WTF.

When I heard more about it I thought: banging on about the gothic doom and gloom of HIV is no longer appropriate (if it ever was). This is a way to talk about HIV and sexual health that doesn't start from fear. I liked that.

When I got there I thought: Wow – what a lot of work. This is weird.

3b. What was your reflective response to ASC?

'HIV Education' is always biased towards what I want you to do. ASC is a very open-ended way of finding stuff out, without it leading to me wanting you to do a particular thing. The horror imagery of HIV has only ever made living with and around the virus worse. ASC is a very welcome alternative way of facing HIV with serious humour.

4. How do you think ASC differs from other representations of HIV in the arts that you are aware of?

It's not scared of the virus.

5. What do you think the effect of staging the project in an art gallery had on the discussion of HIV as opposed to the usual spaces it is discussed in such as medical clinics?

I talk about HIV in lots of settings (not medical clinics). At ASC I had more conversations about colour, pattern and imagery than I did about HIV.

6. What effect has ASC had on your work?

I now consult the ASC Tarot Deck to guide my work decisions (or at least to think about them).

7. Do you have any other observations or comments about Alien Sex Club?

It was a joy to be involved in. I really enjoyed the show and got a lot out of collaborating with Jordan on the event. Thanks so much for the opportunity.

3.7 Harry Clayton-Wright, performer ASC.

1. Who in your experience came to ASC?

An incredibly broad audience. People from all backgrounds and walks of life. Importantly, I felt it reached an audience of people who weren't experts in an artistic field and came along in relation to the subject matter and the scale of the piece.

2. What did people say to you about ASC before / during / after their visit? (please clarify the context in which their comments were made)

Before their visit, I had a lot of friends register their intrigue as to my involvement in ASC. A lot of people were immediately quick to chat about what they thought it meant, in relation to the subject within modern cultural reference, and were excited by the prospect of seeing an artist tackle the subject of HIV, cruising and gay culture and reimagine what it all means visually, through art, in such a unique and exciting way.

During the visit, I was bowled over with the openness in which strangers would discuss the context of the work in relation to their own experiences. As a performative character within the piece, people were quick to divulge secrets and stories to me that felt incredibly confidential and also, at times, quite intense. As an interactive role within ASC, I became a vessel for hearing what the work said to people and you'd be privy to powerful stories, triggered by their encounter with the work in the space. Subjects and stories included shame within childhood, eating disorders, risky behaviour and loneliness/unhappiness, particularly within the gay community. I'm by no means a qualified therapist, but I felt people really needed to talk and could be safe enough with me, within that role, to open up. I know for a fact that this is a result of their emotional connection to the art and the experience as a whole. I dealt with that accordingly within my performance, allowing for what felt like with most people, a real need to talk with someone.

Afterwards, and completely unexpectedly, a young male with whom I'd once chatted to on Grindr - and subsequently became friends with on Facebook - messaged me to tell me that a few months ago he found out he was positive. As he was from an area outside of London, I knew he'd not seen the work directly but only through my posting about it on social media was he aware of the exhibition. He told me he respected the work I did for ASC and that it was nice to see people challenging the stigma in any way they can and that it had made his day a little bit brighter. Obviously I wasn't expecting to receive such a message and it completely affirmed to me why I'd been interested in the project in the first place. I'm still honoured that he sent that.

3a. What was your initial response to ASC?

I was incredibly curious when I first heard about the project on Twitter during the crowdfunding stages of ASC. Through meeting John, I knew that the project would be incredibly special, but it was only when seeing the work in that space did I realise the emotional impact it could have on the world. The scale and ambition of ASC is beyond incredible and I felt it exceeded all expectations.

3b. What was your reflective response to ASC?

I'm honoured I was able to be part of ASC. It's changed the artist I am, the way I want to talk about subjects and the kind of work I want to create. I think it couldn't have come along at a more perfect time. Especially within a London context in the current climate

we find ourselves in with the rise of chemise in our community.

4. How do you think ASC differs from other representations of HIV in the arts that you are aware of?

I feel it differs massively. In dealing with the work in a contemporary fashion, that can offer a sense of humour and personality, I feel it opens us up in a way that isn't full of fear and allows us to explore HIV in a much different emotional state. I had so many personal thoughts that hadn't occurred to me when interacting with the work, and through people's interactions, that it changed me in many ways.

5. What do you think the effect of staging the project in an art gallery had on the discussion of HIV as opposed to the usual spaces it is discussed in such as medical clinics?

I think the work within the space meant that people could reflect in a completely different manner. It was important it was in a neutral space so a discussion could be had that you might not be able to in a medical environment. I believe the context allowed for strangers to open up in ways they wouldn't otherwise.

6. What effect has ASC had on your work?

It's had a massive effect on my work. Working with John directly and seeing his brilliance in delivering such a mammoth work has inspired me to want more for myself. And in regards to emotionally, I want to be able to be more honest with what and how I communicate my ideas. As an artist from a cabaret and comedic background, finding myself in a gallery context broadened my need for conversations that are real, incredibly important and accessible.

7. Do you have any other observations or comments about Alien Sex Club?

I'm so proud to have been involved and look forward to seeing how and where it evolves. It's one of the most rewarding projects I've been part of and I look forward to seeing how it changes the cultural landscape in regards to an ongoing discussion that has a huge emotional effect on who we are as a community.

3.8 Jordan McKenzie, events artist.

1. Who in your experience came to ASC?

It was a broad mix of gay/queer community, artists, those working in the field of HIV research, exhibition goers and funding bodies such as the Wellcome Trust. Though clearly focused on HIV transmission in gay and bisexual men there were multiple points of entry (excuse the pun) into the work and it avoided being didactic instead mixing subversive queer politics with sharp (and often humorous) artistic responses and this is why it got an audience of many different persuasions and motivations.

2. What did people say to you about ASC before / during / after their visit? (please clarify the context in which their comments were made)

I went with a group of friends some of whom were artists and their response was

focused upon how the multiple presentations and immersive environment meant that the work could be read from many different positions. My gay friends responded to the fact that it had many iconic images and characters from gay/popular culture and this meant that they could relate to it and found in the exhibition a space both actual and cultural that they could recognise. They also said that the relative silence in terms of reporting and it being in the news often rendered HIV an almost historical problem and it made the issue more contemporary and addressed their own sexual behaviors and responses to the subject. Some of my art friends said that they were almost overwhelmed by the sheer amount of work that was there and it acted as a kind of assault. We had some very interesting post-exhibition discussions about how spaces have a politeness in terms of their curating and that this one embraced a kind of ecstatic overkill that included the viewer almost to the point of sensory assault, this being so different to the almost 'polite' spaces of other galleries even when they are dealing with issues of queer culture and sexuality.

3a. What was your initial response to ASC?

It was an incredibly rich space of encounter that actually at times suspended any notion of critical distance by its sheer ability to move from pathos to humor to desire to absurdity. The generation of a personal schema and genealogy of HIV characters from the gay/queer world created a total mythology and environment and the make shift nature of the maze reflected this, a constant moving on, building, re-building, cross-referencing, a matrix of facts, myths, popular/queer culture but also an informative scientific knowledge of HIV and it is the integration (I am not sure that this is the correct word as integration suggests a kind of tamed image/encounter) and this encounter was unruly....it fizzed and popped. It also carried with it a queer sense of irreverence and this was linked to a campy performance of tragedy that is so prevalent in gay culture.

3b. What was your reflective response to ASC?

My personal dislike of many contemporary exhibitions that I see in London is that they are for the most part about their own materiality or do not often wander outside of the realm of aesthetics. Political, issue led work that refers to ideas and modes of being beyond the 'art world' are rare and this is what I still carry from the experience. It's skillful integration of potentially diametrically opposed images and meanings and the willingness to handle a huge subject in ways that avoided nostalgia or empty dramatization with the constant flip flop of the informative/serious with effacing irreverence....it's kind of what post-modern identity politics should be, playful, performative, on the move, provocative and resistant. The message in ASC was just that and it was contained in the actual form of the work that for me is one of its most impressive elements. It was also social, I've never been to a show where I've propped up a bar and got pissed on gin or had my tarot read or watched people walk around with baby marrows! I actually remember it as an event and not as an exhibition.

4. How do you think ASC differs from other representations of HIV in the arts that you are aware of?

Often works around this subject are biographical and attempt to illicit empathy. This didn't, it was aggressive and well aware of the dangers of slipping into a homo-normative discourse...it was resistant and in that sense didn't want to be integrated or attempt to play the 'walk in my shoes' card. Its irreverent virtual cartoon world satirized the bleeding heart saccharine presentation of the gay man as victim to his out of control desires. In fact the experience of ASC was one devoid of reading sexuality through a moral compass and this is what made it so refreshing and exciting. I actually learnt a lot about the complexities of the virus from a purely educational perspective as well as modes of behavior and experiences of gay/bisexual men that I had not really been previously aware of in any great detail (chemsex for example). It fought, it played, it

struggled and took risks, mirroring the subject that it addressed. I come from a performance art background and often the body is marked as 'othered', under duress, bleeding, vulnerable, defiant....I think that ASC exploded those hackneyed over-dramatized positions daring to juxtapose huge themes with a kind of end of the pier sensibility. It says as much about access, class and taste as it does about cruising and HIV and it is this that I have often reflected upon in relation to its presentation and the ways that other artists have dealt with this in regard to 'the body' and also HIV.

5. What do you think the effect of staging the project in an art gallery had on the discussion of HIV as opposed to the usual spaces it is discussed in such as medical clinics?

When I was discussing our presentation of work for ASC with Ford, we talked about who has legitimate voices and is given permission and who doesn't. The medical expert dominates this topic; gay/bisexual men are often the subjects, the statistic, the information. The gallery allowed other voices to come to the fore both real and fictional. It acknowledged and restaged gay/queer histories in ways that were creative, unexpected and playful. It kind of was a gallery but that was not what was important. It was the fact that it was an immersive installation and in this respect it could have been in any warehouse or club. I did not even think of it in terms of the gallery, in fact the work being shown in the bowels of a building seemed to be the context for me, walking past heating systems etc, the institution as a kind of body, its workings on view and it being subterranean, like going to a kind of underground club. I think of it in those ways not as an exhibition in a gallery.

6. What effect has ASC had on your work?

I've been increasingly working in collaborative ways but mainly within the arts. Having the opportunity to work with Ford Hickson on our piece made me aware of the exciting possibilities of integrating arts practices with scientific ones. We think very differently and we were constantly surprising ourselves by our opposite approaches, sharing our perspectives and in the end going 'oh, yes, I've never thought of it that way but I can see that now.' It's not about 'explaining' science or art but making new experiences and thoughts from these multiple experiences of the world. It also reminded me that making art can be joyous and at times I forget this as I become swamped by the logistical and organizational aspects of producing exhibitions and shows and often having to slot it into short periods of time due to the constraints of my job. It also gave me the chance to work with my flat-mate Andy, who has never practiced 'art' before but wanted to have a go and I thought that this was the time to actually take risks and give up control of the process of making to a large extent. I had forgotten how bored I was of art about art and it reminded me that there is work out there that is not doing that and (though it may not be cool) in Frieze terms, I want to be part of a more unruly and playful mode of art making that ignores the authority of the taste makers. It made me want to make by employing desire, pleasure and joy, qualities that I suspect art colleges are in a process of killing stone dead.

7. Do you have any other observations or comments about Alien Sex Club?

No

3.9 Lauren Cannell, invigilator.

1. Who in your experience came to ASC?

Mostly young to middle aged gay men. However, there was a real mix of people who came along - families, old women, young straight men, people involved in the arts, people in the health services.

2. What did people say to you about ASC before / during / after their visit? (please clarify the context in which their comments were made)

Before their visit - People seemed shocked and intrigued (in a good way), and demanded an explanation that I couldn't always articulate, I ended up saying "You'll just have to go and see it" a lot.

During - People thought it was 'cool', 'overwhelming', 'fun', 'impressive'. Lots of people enquired as to if the exhibition was group or solo, how long it took to create the work and if the artist(s) had HIV themselves. Two people in particular opened up to me about having HIV. I think this was as a result of the atmosphere being opening and welcoming. Lots of people asked what it had to do with aliens and everybody believed the tarot card reader (accuracy was amazing, apparently!). A middle aged lady informed us that we were glorifying sodomy.

After - I made a point of asking people, "How was it?", and felt I could really gauge if people had enjoyed it. Some people would reply, "Interesting...", others looked as though they had been holding their breath and felt as though they could finally exhale "WOW! Overwhelming! What have I just seen? Must get my friend to see this". And there were a few like the sodomy lady who just didn't get it.

3a. What was your initial response to ASC?

New, exciting and art I could really get behind - honest, witty, funny.

3b. What was your reflective response to ASC?

ASC went deeper than I initially thought it did (probably associated more with fun at 1st). However, people were genuinely moved and opened up about their experiences. It became a place to share, and not always about HIV - a really inclusive environment

4. How do you think ASC differs from other representations of HIV in the arts that you are aware of?

HIV is portrayed elsewhere that it is a life threatening illness whereas ASC shows that doesn't have to be the case.

5. What do you think the effect of staging the project in an art gallery had on the discussion of HIV as opposed to the usual spaces it is discussed in such as medical clinics?

See above - inclusive, sharing environment.

Although Ambika is technically an art gallery I don't think it has the chromophobic effect of a bright white cube gallery. The exhibition was more like an event and completely encompassed the space. It's grubby like an underground disused factory that has been turned into a gay bar in Berlin (or Bognor). It didn't feel like a gallery, people could get drinks and take part in activities. The interactive nature of the art meant discussion naturally opened up between participants.

The set up and environment was easy going and you could choose how far you wished to participate. You didn't necessarily have to be thinking about HIV to come to the

gallery. Whereas at a clinic there is no other reason you'd be there. The exhibition forced you to think about HIV, which in turn, may have influenced somebody's decision to get a test done. Whether they have HIV or not, they know their status - a big step in the right direction.

6. What effect has ASC had on your work?

The immunisation ritual that was performed in Model, Liverpool made me realise the possibilities of the creative process, and working without boundaries. It was a real light switch moment for me.

I've also looked at gender issues as a result in my own work.

7. Do you have any other observations or comments about Alien Sex Club?

People enjoyed the semiotic value of the work and liked to talk to me and the other invigilators through their decoding of pieces such as the PREP curtain. I think it was really important to have and encourage that interaction. The welcoming and inclusive aspect of the exhibition was its biggest success. Guests really took it to their hearts and on a number of occasions would return with friends and just hang out and be immersed within the exhibition, spending hours cruising the maze. Although HIV is a serious issue, people affected with HIV have to live their lives too, and can do. The artists work is a helpful step towards changing societal views.

3.10 Marie Rousseau, Terrence Higgins Trust.

1. Who in your experience came to ASC?

People interested in art and men and women, different generations from the gay community.

2. What did people say to you about ASC before / during / after their visit? (please clarify the context in which their comments were made)

How they thought it was interesting to have a POCT testing (HIV rapid test) in an art setting. Most who commented and participated in the test where initially scared to take the test, but also intrigued about the concept. It was quite intense in trying to contain peoples' initial reaction and expectation of the outcome, and what it would mean if it was a reactive test.

One heterosexual man asked if he could film his wife being tested! Of course I did not allow him to. Her reaction was full of fear. When I asked him if he would like to be tested, he declined. I found this quite interesting.

The rest of the men who tested where young gay men who were very confident and knowledgeable about HIV and the purpose of testing . They thought that it was very normal and said it part of their life and their responsibility to have regular tests, comparing it to visiting the dentist.

3a. What was your initial response to ASC?

Really excited and in total admiration that somebody would want to pull off an exhibition about such a difficult topic.

3b. What was your reflective response to ASC?

At first emotional, and also it made me realize how far we have come in the HIV field,

and how things have changed. That was really noticeable in the younger generation and how they have a different attitude towards sex and HIV and how they communicate. Even though at times I felt it was slightly behind as most communication was now digital, and not necessarily one to one dialogue.

4. How do you think ASC differs from other representations of HIV in the arts that you are aware of?

No comparison to any other HIV representation I have ever seen in over 30 years.

It was thought provoking in how the medical “drugs” could be seen visual way that did not make them seem scary or threatening.

There was an element of reminiscence for me, but not sadness that I have always experienced at previous representations.

5. What do you think the effect of staging the project in an art gallery had on the discussion of HIV as opposed to the usual spaces it is discussed in such as medical clinics?

I think it must have had a positive effect. To open up peoples’ imagination and knowledge about HIV in a different environment that has no similarity to a medical setting.

And also where people would have never thought of taking a HIV test, or wanting to see a visual interpretation of the topic of HIV and how it can mean so many different things.

6. What effect has ASC had on your work?

It has given me hope. Having dialogues with the younger generation that were so clued about their sexuality and their health made me very happy.

It has reminded me of why I do my job.

7. Do you have any other observations or comments about Alien Sex Club?

Can’t wait to see it Liverpool!

3.11 Susannah Hewlett, performer ASC.

1. Who in your experience came to ASC?

Through doing the tarot readings I met lots of different people ranging from young art students to middle aged people working across a wider career bracket. I did meet a lot of gay men from a range of demographics during my time on the project.

2. What did people say to you about ASC before / during / after their visit? (please clarify the context in which their comments were made)

Before the show (me explaining to people)- there was genuine excitement and intrigue at the way in which the artist had envisioned the project - the science / art cross over.

During the show - some people commented on how the subject matter was perhaps beyond their current understanding but the vernacular and John's aesthetic choices - his use of colour/humour/pop images made it accessible.

People were definitely very excited about the maximal aesthetic & epic scale of the show. Both had a big impact on people & their wider thinking around HIV today.

3a. What was your initial response to ASC?

Excitement & awe at the huge web of ideas and ways of thinking that were explored within this one project. Lots of questions and then finding ways to explore this visually through this new art-architecture created by John and the re-imagining of gay sex spaces.

3b. What was your reflective response to ASC?

Really powerful show full of genuinely new and exciting work. Feel that the multi-form approach to the project made it unique and meant a much wider conversation happened as a result.

Not didactic but hugely informative. Sprawling narrative, rich tapestry of ideas on such an epic scale. Made me not only think but learn about the current climate of HIV within gay culture.

4. How do you think ASC differs from other representations of HIV in the arts that you are aware of?

I'm not hugely in touch with this. I could only site historical works – works reflecting the 80's crisis. Perhaps stuff that's not hugely relevant today.

5. What do you think the effect of staging the project in an art gallery had on the discussion of HIV as opposed to the usual spaces it is discussed in such as medical clinics?

Engages in a different way - new audiences. Accessible and inclusive in a different way – people that wouldn't necessarily be engaging in this conversation are able to through the show / performances that took place.

6. What effect has ASC had on your work?

Has given me the possibility of collaborating with scientist Professor Sheena McCormack. I've never done this type of collaboration before which is exciting

Also making me think about my position and ask questions about what it means to be a straight women making work within this world.

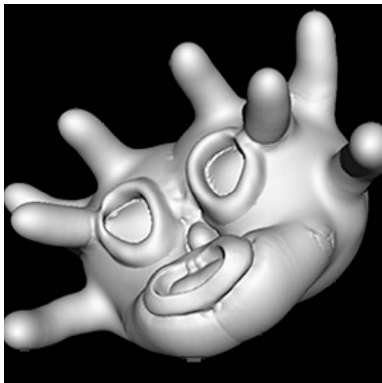
Also just hugely inspired by John!

7. Do you have any other observations or comments about Alien Sex Club?

Really feel it's been a hugely impactful show on a lot of people who experienced it in a lot of different ways. John should be applauded for his ability to imagine staging something so informed, witty, epic and necessary.

Appendix 4
Responses to Alien Sex Club on Instagram

There were 700 posts on Instagram that included the hashtag #aliensexclub in October 2015. A large proportion of these were made in the lead up to the exhibition as promotional material, which I have disqualified from the analysis. 187 posts were available for analysis that related to the installation at Ambika P3.



arts_business_init... FOLLOW

48 likes 13w

arts_business_initiative Alien Sex Club: an epic new art installation by John Walter addressing the HIV sydenic www.aliensexclub.com [Amika P3](https://www.instagram.com/Amika_P3) London 24 July - 14 August [@unil Westminster](https://www.instagram.com/unil Westminster) [@wellicomecollection](https://www.instagram.com/wellicomecollection) [@ceograms](https://www.instagram.com/@ceograms)

#Art #HIV #ContemporaryArt #London #Installation #AlienSexClub #AppliedArt #Issues

[@twopeacocks](https://www.instagram.com/twopeacocks) [@e_m_d_w](https://www.instagram.com/@e_m_d_w) [@glnaeve](https://www.instagram.com/glnaeve) Chilling

❤️ Add a comment... 000



bright FOLLOWING

[@twopeacocks](https://www.instagram.com/twopeacocks), [@aymagagi](https://www.instagram.com/aymagagi), [@marksctwood](https://www.instagram.com/marksctwood), [@ruth_nelson](https://www.instagram.com/ruth_nelson), [@garypowell](https://www.instagram.com/garypowell) and [@steff_turner](https://www.instagram.com/steff_turner) like this

[@brightr](https://www.instagram.com/brightr) #aliensexclub what is this I wonder?

❤️ Add a comment... 000



marksctwood FOLLOWING

45 likes 12w

[@marksctwood](https://www.instagram.com/marksctwood) Spotted an Ellen Mars De Wicher Man Tree Daemon in the studio yesterday catching up with the work for [@twopeacocks](https://www.instagram.com/@twopeacocks)! #aliensexclub

[@marksctwood](https://www.instagram.com/marksctwood) #twitich #man #tree #falcon #curator

[@twopeacocks](https://www.instagram.com/twopeacocks) [@marksctwood](https://www.instagram.com/marksctwood) bloody brilliant!

[@e_m_d_w](https://www.instagram.com/e_m_d_w) [@where_is_frances](https://www.instagram.com/where_is_frances) [@dabbsdabbs](https://www.instagram.com/dabbsdabbs)

❤️ Add a comment... 000



joan_dawk FOLLOW

14 likes 12w

[@joan_dawk](https://www.instagram.com/joan_dawk) Keep seeing this around central London wonder what it's about? I lmmmm #aliensexclub #yellow #sticker #promoting #advertising #art #exhibition #curious #mystery #alien #club #hydepark #london

[@twopeacocks](https://www.instagram.com/twopeacocks) [@e_m_d_w](https://www.instagram.com/@e_m_d_w)

❤️ Add a comment... 000



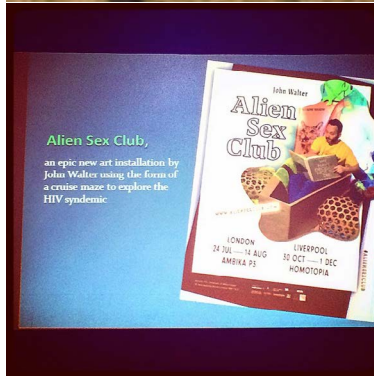
keystone69 FOLLOWING

[@garypowell](https://www.instagram.com/garypowell) likes this

[@keystone69](https://www.instagram.com/keystone69) #aliensexclub

[@twopeacocks](https://www.instagram.com/twopeacocks) Thank you [@keystone69](https://www.instagram.com/keystone69)

❤️ Add a comment... 000

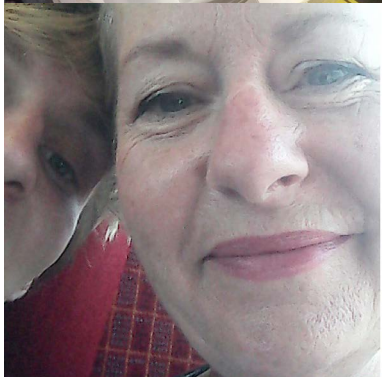


garypowell FOLLOWING

[@twopeacocks](https://www.instagram.com/twopeacocks), [@e_m_d_w](https://www.instagram.com/e_m_d_w), [@edwordk](https://www.instagram.com/edwordk) and [@keystone69](https://www.instagram.com/keystone69) like this

[@garypowell](https://www.instagram.com/garypowell) #aliensexclub on the big screen

❤️ Add a comment... 000



teddichindler FOLLOWING

[@twopeacocks](https://www.instagram.com/twopeacocks), [@garypowell](https://www.instagram.com/garypowell), [@hopperandspace](https://www.instagram.com/hopperandspace) and [@brendanw96](https://www.instagram.com/brendanw96) like this

[@teddichindler](https://www.instagram.com/teddichindler) On the way to London with the mam :D walking with #aliensexclub at #londonpride #mom #family #pride #selfie #notifier #love #my #mum #gaypride #igst #support

[@twopeacocks](https://www.instagram.com/twopeacocks) Waaahooooooooo

❤️ Add a comment... 000



nic_carrollbtin FOLLOWING

[@twopeacocks](https://www.instagram.com/twopeacocks), [@garypowell](https://www.instagram.com/garypowell), [@bertisll](https://www.instagram.com/bertisll) and [@se11dave](https://www.instagram.com/se11dave) like this

[@nic_carrollbtin](https://www.instagram.com/nic_carrollbtin) [@twintetcom](https://www.instagram.com/twintetcom) #aliensexclub #grovepark #johnwalter

[@twopeacocks](https://www.instagram.com/twopeacocks) Bring it on! [@garypowell](https://www.instagram.com/garypowell) Nice unt! ♥

❤️ Add a comment... 000



e_m_d_w FOLLOWING

20 likes 11w

[@e_m_d_w](https://www.instagram.com/e_m_d_w) #aliensexclub #lovewins

❤️ Add a comment... 000



e_m_d_w FOLLOWING

[@twopeacocks](https://www.instagram.com/twopeacocks), [@darryl_de_prez](https://www.instagram.com/darryl_de_prez), [@almacgill](https://www.instagram.com/almacgill), [@photobecallingjames](https://www.instagram.com/photobecallingjames), [@samuel_levack](https://www.instagram.com/samuel_levack) and [@naomyega](https://www.instagram.com/naomyega) like this

[@e_m_d_w](https://www.instagram.com/e_m_d_w) #aliensexclub #getanangelts

❤️ Add a comment... 000



garypowell Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

e_m_d_w, allenelsheri and shericon Bw like this
garypowell More coverage for #aliensexclub #timeout #london



garypowell FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, stvnice, bertisl_ shericon and gardenewilly56 like this
garypowell #aliensexclub #Pride.LDNParade #pride



etidier Cockspur Street FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, bertisl_, crateofstars, jedhassel, gay_tv, garypowell and runter_apparel like this
etidier The Alien Sex Club London & Liverpool at London Pride parade... #london #gaypride #londonpride #londongaypride #aliensex #aliensexclub #londonlife #rafalgarsquare #pridelondon prince.ofneverland it's like homestuck



bertisl_ FOLLOWING

24 likes 11w
bertisl_ #aliensexclub #pridemarch
lonamjacobson we saw you on the parade!!!
bertisl_ @lonamjacobson omg no way who where you with
lonamjacobson emily, I wasn't 100% sure it was u
bertisl_ @lonamjacobson aha it was me
#aliensexclub



jedi_ckens FOLLOW

twopeacocks, stvnice, garypowell and philippabaines like this
jedi_ckens Happy pride #aliensexclub



garypowell FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, e_m_d_w, edwordk and bertisl_ like this
garypowell Bailey the #aliensexclub #Pride.LDNParade dog



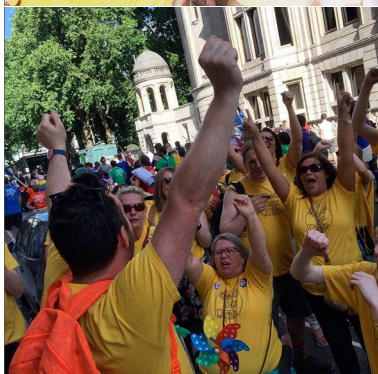
garypowell FOLLOWING

edwordk, bertisl_, birdbywater, shericon, katetornelli, e_m_d_w and stvnice like this
garypowell #aliensexclub #Pride.LDNParade #yellow



garypowell FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, bertisl_, ruthbeasley, birdbywater, ellis.mos, shericon, e_m_d_w, gardenewilly56, judithcarton and bintmcskint like this
garypowell #aliensexclub #Pride.LDNParade Looks like Tarzan, dances like Jane
judithcarton **wolfwhistle**!!!



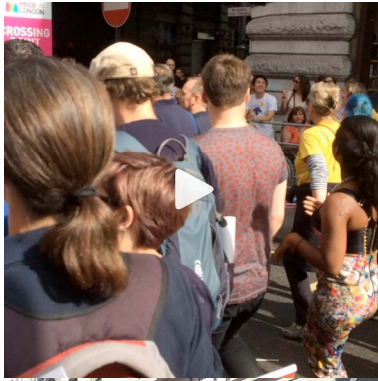
garypowell FOLLOWING

e_m_d_w, bertisl_ gardenewilly56 and ruthbeasley like this
garypowell Jubilation #aliensexclub #Pride.LDNParade



garypowell FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, edwordk, bertisl_ shericon, e_m_d_w and gardenewilly56 like this
garypowell These two made #aliensexclub today



garypowell FOLLOWING

snapskies, bertail_birdbywater, shericon_jo_il_jo_il_jo_illili, e_m_d_w, stincke_jean_dawk and juithcarton like this
garypowell #aliensexclub #PrideLDNParade #channing shericon Aw Fraser looks so good

Add a comment...



dannny_k FOLLOWING

145 likes 11w
dannny_k @Coombspaul And me at this years #pride2015 so crazy walking with #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



cococannell FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, angelas1971, bibbles16, e_m_d_w, roey_says, ash_feritto, francesclay, snapskies, katmandhucc and vltte_fuller like this
cococannell Had an absolute screen at pride @twopeacocks #pride #londonpride #visualarts #hiv #aliensexclub #googleme twopeacocks Amazing day! Great having you there @cococannell xxxxxx

Add a comment...



twopeacocks

34 likes 10w
twopeacocks Welcome to The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine @LSHTMpress #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



discreetcharm AMBIKA P3 FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, laurakastilani, edwordk, richiemoment, danielle_groom, hep_j, e_m_d_w and ansuowdow like this
discreetcharm #johnwalter #aliensexclub #ambikap3 @twopeacocks @e_m_d_w

Add a comment...



twopeacocks

bertill_sabraz_arc, dannydefelitas, gardenerwilly56, matt.ager, e_m_d_w, stincke and boodletlem like this
twopeacocks Teddi @tessaschindler aka Aunt Sally #aliensexclub #maximalism #Installation #Pride #PrideLDNParade #HIV #temporartattoo

Add a comment...



terju London Pride FOLLOWING

14 likes 11w
terju Part 2 of 3 of the most interesting participants of #London #Pride: #AlienSexClub and the man #ICANN reported as holding up an ISIS flag at the parade but he is actually advertising for a gay sex shop in Liverpool. #CanUsee #NoJudgements #AliensNeedLoveToo #AlienLoveNeeds #OneDigSign #LondonPride
twopeacocks www.aliensexclub.com
It's actually a massive art installation that uses the idea of the cruise maze to organise a series of disparate works that address sexual transmission risk and cruising including painting, fortune telling performances, a bar and free rapid HIV testing - comel x Jomi
terju @twopeacocks thanks for the info! twopeacocks @terju look forward to seeing you at the opening July 23rd x

Add a comment...



catherineclapham FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, e_m_d_w, garypowell, brighter and beesingbisulbitchits87 like this
catherineclapham Pride #aliensexclub #prideparade

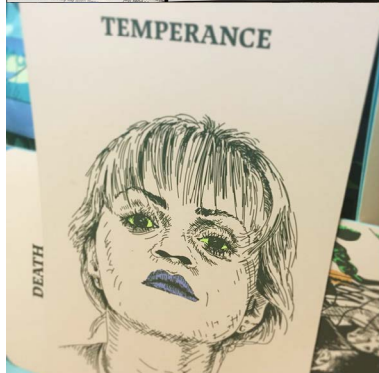
Add a comment...



garypowell AMBIKA P3 FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, nrcarter, birdbywater, shericon_jo_il_jo_il_jo_illili, e_m_d_w and lucy_parnell like this
garypowell #aliensexclub & @triketmet on the same spread!!

Add a comment...



urbanalex Alien Sex Club FOLLOWING

16 likes 8w
urbanalex #temperance #hiv #exhibition #aliensexclub #johnwalter monoblondismuetze sorry, looks like bellatrix?

Add a comment...



alansmitheeee
Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

18 likes
alansmitheeee We all up in the #aliensexclub
twopeacocks Stunning @ash_ferlito CHEM JESTER

Add a comment...



alansmitheeee
Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

15 likes
alansmitheeee In the #aliensexclub

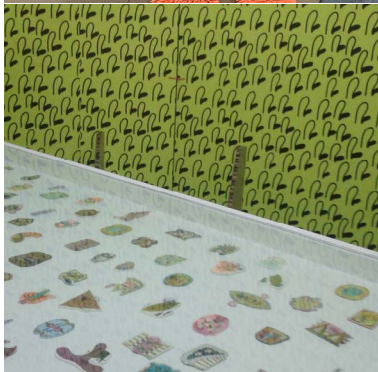
Add a comment...



alansmitheeee
Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

18 likes
alansmitheeee Jeff Banks gams @dgrafferty in the #aliensexclub
dgrafferty No way! Has Jeff done a collection for Cyberdog?
simonparris!!
johntiney I really like this piece, especially with its coffin (not shown here)
@twopeacocks, well done, I really enjoyed my visit.

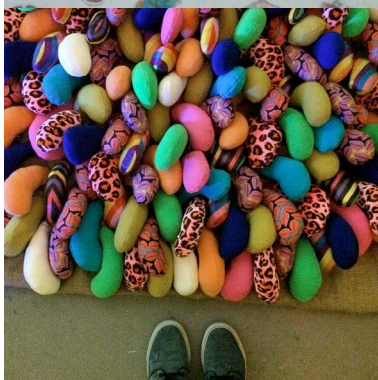
Add a comment...



bethsaha FOLLOW

twopeacocks, edwordk, b.ahana, luisignaciordríguez, fionnuala4000, e_m_d_w and dagostino_md like this
bethsaha Deep in the #aliensexclub at #ambikap3 John Walters's pattern. thecolmansingularity So wanna go to this. When is it on?
bethsaha Until mid-August! I need to go back to see more if you're planning a trip.
luisignaciordríguez @yous, I need to go back to proper listen to video thecolmansingularity @bethsaha @luisignaciordríguez trip?
luisignaciordríguez Yus
bethsaha Next Wednesday / Thursday? Show's open 11am - 7pm.

Add a comment...



sophesnaps FOLLOW

12 likes
sophesnaps #aliensexclub @ihavehishingwithfloors more of a rug in the cruise maze #itsart #johnwalter #craft #zainprints

Add a comment...



alansmitheeee
Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

17 likes
alansmitheeee #bmt in the #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



alansmitheeee
Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

17 likes
alansmitheeee Bossman @twopeacocks in the #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



sophesnaps FOLLOW

11 likes
sophesnaps Welcome to #aliensexclub #ambikaP3 @aceagrams emotions_from_photons Sounds fun

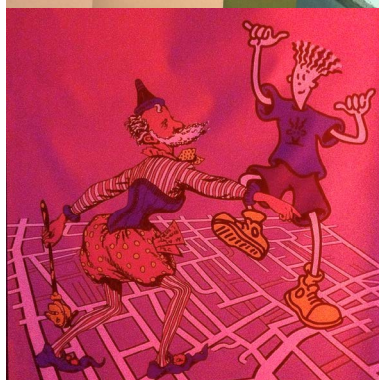
Add a comment...



sophesnaps FOLLOW

edwordk, luciennsimpson, amesc86, e_m_d_w, unlimited_productions and la_madame_noir like this
sophesnaps #aliensexclub can tell your future #arot #dotcotton

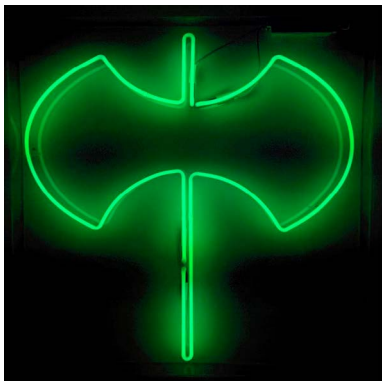
Add a comment...



edwordk FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, bywallidondon, markscottwood and jeremywillet like this
edwordk Amazing #aliensexclub

Add a comment...

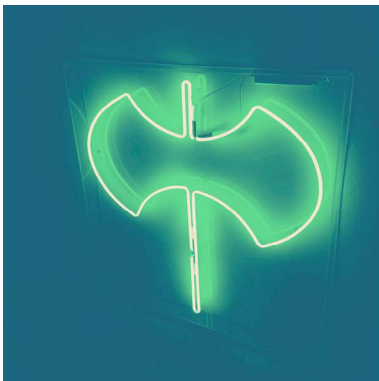


sansometom FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, edwardk, bright, juan_garalzabal, pocico_people, emilyomarra, idalindomingos, e_m_d_w, garypowell and gsus_lopez like this

sansometom @twopeacocks at @ambika_p3 #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



emilyomarra Ambika P3 FOLLOW

79 likes

emilyomarra #aliensexclub #londonart

Add a comment...



hollingsby FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, edwardk, pamster_gram, emilyomarra, e_m_d_w, garypowell and gsus_lopez like this

hollingsby Detail from John Walter's epic and mesmerising show Alien Sex Club at Ambika P3 @twopeacocks #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



sdcifford Ambika P3 FOLLOW

14 likes

sdcifford Giant inflatable HIV Virus at the Alien Sex Club . So random! #onlyinlondon #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



bearsouper FOLLOW

twopeacocks, gardenervilly56, michellevincentbaines, emilyomarra, garypowell, yorkshireandyella and gsus_lopez like this

bearsouper #AlienSexClub gardenervilly56 Lovely to see you 🤗🤗🤗🤗🤗🤗 xx bearsouper So great to see you! 🤗

Add a comment...

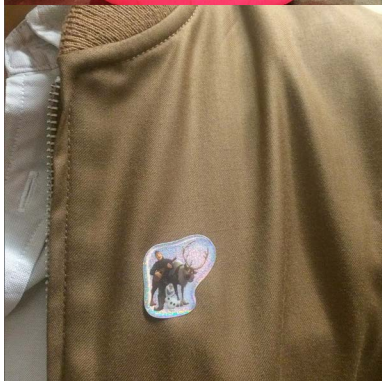


whitecubicle Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

25 likes

whitecubicle #AlienSexClub by #JohnWalter at #AmbikaP3 until 14th August!

Add a comment...



whitecubicle Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

26 likes

whitecubicle Free #Frozen stickers with your gun and tonic at AlienSexClub by #JohnWalter at #AmbikaP3 until 14th August! markscottwood Sadly I missed out on the stickers, @twopeacocks. And the guns. whitecubicle #gunandtonic

Add a comment...



janeymae_ FOLLOW

twopeacocks, halloweenrumbie, wasemachine, emilyomarra, josielkonrad, amazingtwins, e_m_d_w and gsus_lopez like this

Janeymae_ Alien Sex Club Janeymae_ Great show #aliensexclub #johnwalter Janeymae_ 35 Marylebone Road Janeymae_ @houseofflorsofficial totally bronzo wasemachine My gosh what a tan @houseofflorsofficial

Add a comment...



castaboyaspella FOLLOW

21 likes

castaboyaspella #AlienSexClub #JohnWalter #AlienSexClubLondon #AmbikaP3 24 July- 14 August 2015 #AlienSexClubLiverpool #lomotopafestival 30 October 2015 - 1 December 2015 #AlienSexClubDrawings #ExploringTheRelationshipBetweenHIVandVisualCultureToday

Add a comment...



niofwales FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, mr_colds, kittymae, clareissou and whitecubicle like this

niofwales Go see @twopeacocks's Alien Sex Club show at Ambika P3 Gallery III #HIV #Architecture #aliensexclub

Add a comment...

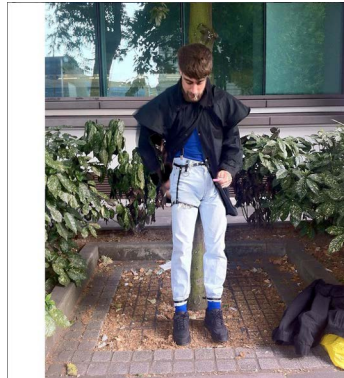


eddyowbee FOLLOW

twopeacocks, dene23_ll_make_you_rich, living_out_loud_ emilyomarra, e_m_d_w and gsus_lopez like this

eddyowbee #neon #aliensexclub #London #JohnWalter

Add a comment... 3



tiny_thief_ FOLLOWING

24 likes

tiny_thief_ Alien Sex Club vibes @benjehshoughton #aliensexclub #foliage

Add a comment... 3

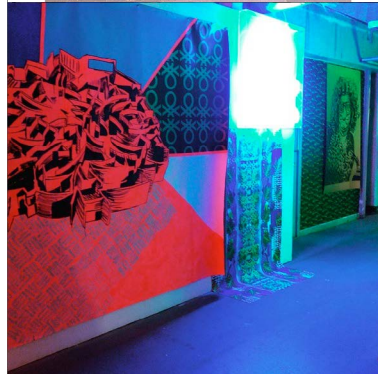


francesdisley FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, gemmacleopatra, angels1971, thomas_goddard, emilyomarra, westbuztoyoyu, aah_ferito, e_m_d_w, markcottonwood and jonathan_baldock like this

francesdisley @twopeacocks John Walter's amazing #aliensexclub !!!

Add a comment... 3



francesdisley FOLLOWING

15 likes

francesdisley #aliensexclub francesdisley @twopeacocks

Add a comment... 3



francesdisley FOLLOWING

16 likes

francesdisley #aliensexclub @twopeacocks

Add a comment... 3



rebeccagyeo FOLLOW

twopeacocks, verachok, joleese2015, Bw Jaylray, emilyomarra, Vignoswenskys, e_m_d_w and lucysheen like this

rebeccagyeo Sausages demystified. Got that Friday feeling #aliensexclub #These12ThingsAreTrue #liveart verachok We ♥ sausages

Add a comment... 3

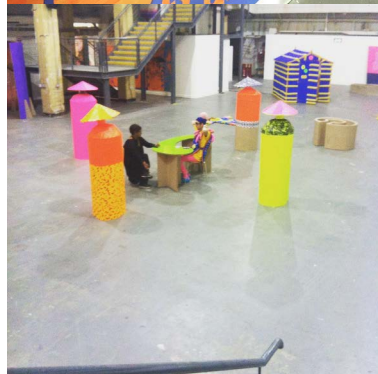


meaveang FOLLOW

twopeacocks, maryfisherart, curatorchar, happysshieywebb, scrimshanker84, avitapharmacy, emilyomarra, stabasoryheart and e_m_d_w like this

meaveang Had the great opportunity to attend John Walter's PV of his new exhibition 'alien sex club' in London last night with the lovely @curatorchar #stagram #aliensexclub #johnwalter #privateview #hiv

Add a comment... 3



cat_hollinshead FOLLOW

twopeacocks, e_m_d_w, emilyomarra and huckstastings like this

cat_hollinshead Intense chatz at #aliensexclub

Add a comment... 3

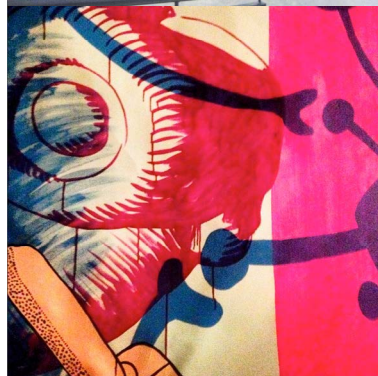


kris_emmerson FOLLOWING

11 likes

kris_emmerson #fantasticplantinfatablethe ad #aliensexclub #johnwalter @twopeacocks @e_m_d_w Exhibition runs until 14th August at #ambikap3

Add a comment... 3



emilypope_88 FOLLOW

twopeacocks, kotealt, joshuapaticichart, katecooper2, emilyomarra, nicolettalambertucci, coccocannell and matt_jamie like this

emilypope_88 #johnwalter #aliensexclub #ambikap3

Add a comment... 3



vilte_fuller
Ambika P3
22 likes
vilte_fuller #aliensexclub



garypowell
twopeacocks, edwardk, ndcarter, hclaytonwright, emilyomarra, shericon and jo_ll_jo_ll_iiiiii like this
garypowell #aliensexclub montage #1



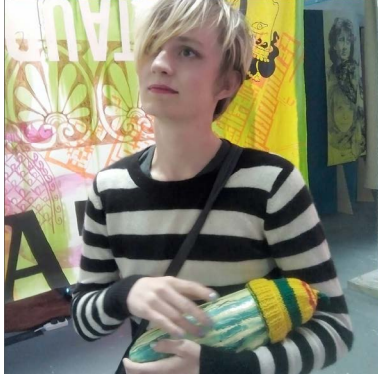
garypowell



edwardk, ndcarter, emilyomarra, christina23_ll_make_you_rich, amy21_ll_make_you_rich and darlene23_ll_make_you_rich like this
garypowell #aliensexclub montage #3



teddichindler



16 likes
teddichindler At my cousins @twopeacocks #exhibition #aliensexclub #art #amazing #photoshoot #wasamazing #relatingtome: #narcissism #narcissist #emo #sweater #fashion #narrow #with #a #that #poster #5f/ miko_bouz Great! teddichindler Thank you :3



ambika_p3
twopeacocks, l_ll_ii, ndcarter, sabinaysys, willietje, esther22_ll_make_you_rich and aimeeswumaw like this
ambika_p3 Now showing at P3 until 14 August #aliensexclub #johnwater #exhibition #london



kiri_emmerson
twopeacocks, katejeppeesen, glodeillyryc, jeremywillett, chambersfineart and hellamassive like this
kiri_emmerson Alien Sex Club - John Walter and Dr Alison Roger #art #artopening #artshow #exhibition #aliensexclub #londonartists



garypowell
twopeacocks, emilyomarra, edwardk, ndcarter and shericon like this
garypowell #aliensexclub montage #2



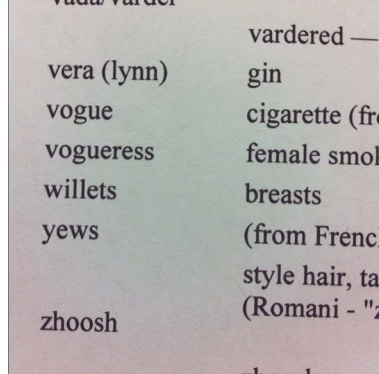
garypowell



twopeacocks, edwardk, ndcarter, emilyomarra, jo_ll_jo_ll_iiiiii and carat23_ll_make_you_rich like this
garypowell #aliensexclub montage #4



jeremywillett



11 likes
jeremywillett Thank you @twopeacocks for placing a #polari glossary at the gin bar at #aliensexclub. It is nice to learn my surname has an added layer of meaning to the Huguenot origins.
jen_lewandowski @seanaishe
seanaishe @jen_lewandowski voguerness
twopeacocks @jeremywillett Huguenot = Huge Knockers



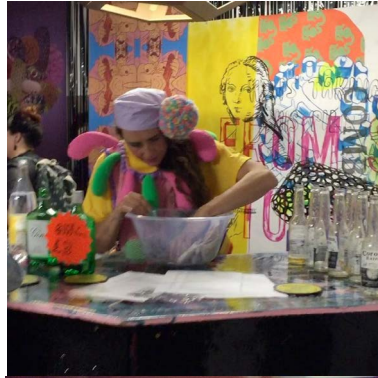
ambika_p3
twopeacocks, l_ll_ii, ndcarter, sabinaysys, willietje and Gq_may1 like this
ambika_p3 Now showing at P3 until 14 August #aliensexclub #johnwater #exhibition #london



ambika_p3 Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, l____ll, ndcarter, sabrinaysys, williegje, boggermocker, estinezz, ill, make_you_rich, charlie_brear, hirocesc and miss_lola_mae like this

ambika_p3 Now showing at P3 until 14 August #aliensexclub #johnwalter #exhibition #london IMAGE BY TIM BOWDITCH



shaahin.shahablou FOLLOW

20 likes

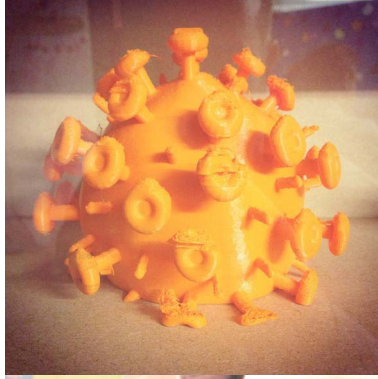
shaahin.shahablou #AlienSexClub #JohnWalter #AlienSexClubExhibitionByJohnWalter #Exhibition #Art #Sex #HIV #Performance #Instagood #EverydayeverywhereLondon #London #UK ash_ferlito #AlienSexClub @twopeacocks



verachok FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, colin_macy, annasulan, lucicastle, faizalazral, sandysclarke, tombyth and packetofchips like this

verachok Possibly one of my fav bits of #aliensexclub



craig_donaghy FOLLOW

twopeacocks, a.conan, bearsouper, yorkshireandyfella and seana_jeann like this

craig_donaghy Loved #aliensexclub thanks for taking me @bearsouper

John Walter London

If only all art with an educational mission promised as much fun as Alien Sex Club, tackling HIV and its place in popular culture with fortune tellers, zany cartoons, psychedelic wallpaper and suggestive vegetables in hats. Walter's sculptures, paintings, videos and performances, born from research with HIV specialist Dr Alison Rodger, are housed in "cruise maze", a setting for sexual discovery in gay clubs and saunas.



garypowell FOLLOWING

14 likes

garypowell #aliensexclub in The Guardian



ash_ferlito FOLLOWING

39 likes

ash_ferlito Chem Jester #AlienSexClub @twopeacocks testostest3 Yeeeeeeeeeeeee!



e_m_d_w Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, tompl_, delftaders, hugoharrison, e_m_nelson, vite_fuller, chimpohappy, cococannell and Inquino like this

e_m_d_w Yeast Cabaret performing 'Come to my party...loads of charlie' devised by Jordan McKenzie and Ford Hickson #aliensexclub



markscottwood FOLLOWING

30 likes

markscottwood Representin' #aliensexclub at #Thorwich #pride.



Jaria FOLLOW

11 likes

Jaria #aliensexclub



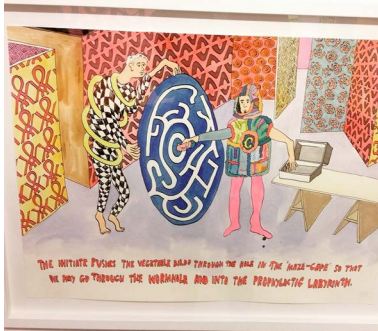
tdanielisilva Ambika P3 FOLLOW

twopeacocks, miguel_rulvo, bluemammal, joeliedrinnage, callumieohughes, ernesto_shim, lopesmateus1976, pedro.urbanogm, leomatsberling and andrielaansel like this

tdanielisilva Alien Sex Club, John Walter. Alien Sex Club explores the relationship between visual culture and HIV today. It takes the shape of a 'cruise maze', a spatial form common to sex clubs and gay saunas, to bring together works that address the complex subject of contemporary sexual health. #johnwalter #aliensexclub #exhibition #london bluemammal totally awesome!



wasemachine FOLLOW
twopeacocks, virginiabiggs, mcbridan, distorteddreams, xanderamaral, rowanrobots, immames..., mikaes87_h and tshaas26 like this
wasemachine #aliensexclub
wasemachine #aliensexclub #cantspill



wasemachine FOLLOW
12 likes 7w
wasemachine @rowanrobots #aliensexclub
rowanrobots [video] [video]
distorteddreams Hi contact details please need to pitch an event? X



melaniejussell FOLLOWING
twopeacocks, helaytonwright, crederenee, ash_ferito and davidmyvoid like this
melaniejussell #trotreading #aliensexclublondon #aliensexclub tutugunu Sure....



melaniejussell FOLLOWING
twopeacocks, ollanski, edwordrk, garypowell, alyssadezzz, artoftobal, frillpmoolg, davidmyvoid, drckqvdo and joe_bun_keo like this
melaniejussell #painting #aliensexclub



thisisshaun Ambika P3 FOLLOW
twopeacocks, aleahned, learol, sackroybur, arctichysteria, luke_clement, hulzi, agnes, shalma.youab and randombangle like this
thisisshaun #aliensexclub



thisisshaun FOLLOW
25 likes 7w
thisisshaun this bitch @_rhannamarie [video] [video] #wonderstep #tempress #sgltor #fearon #yonce #awkwardeyes #richibitch #aliensexclub #bowtie #_rhannamarie I love you forever baby [video]



teddichindler FOLLOWING
11 likes 7w
teddichindler @twopeacocks I was so happy when I saw this at #aliensexclub :D #cartoon #marvin #the Amazin #art #exhibition #fantastic #toonytunes che940
twopeacocks @teddichindler he's brilliant isn't he?!
teddichindler Just made this my new phone background :D
twopeacocks If you email me to remind me I'll send you a proper JPEG of it luv xx @teddichindler
gulartadvisory Beautiful!



melaniejussell FOLLOWING
twopeacocks, joewalshlondon and hopescrochet like this
melaniejussell #pompons #aliensexclublondon #aliensexclub



emmamoreore FOLLOW
twopeacocks, graeme_lavery, paulkindersley, orlabasq, mmdortos, garethphillipou, allisonclayd, white_cave_at_dusk, mettsjaegaardraest and jonathan_ballock like this
emmamoreore My past and present courtesy of #aliensexclub today @aliensexclub My Dot Cotton future is just out of frame



aboutstu FOLLOW
twopeacocks, jorellie3, divine_lady_v, nature_jack, billieckson, graeme_lavery, campussociety, daisyree, simples30 and garypowell like this
aboutstu I'm "Trveda Traced" people...! #aliensexclub #universityofwestminster #johnwater #london #londonart #londonlife #alternativart #truvadashore #dameednseverage chardypilot [video]



melenierussell FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, burmtceans, lozzerobbins, jamie.f.harris, bjornindustries, vitt, kajlurand, themanik_, davidmyrvoid and youngpollock like this

melenierussell #painting #aliensexclub #aliensexclublondon #johnwalter themanik_ Nice pic :]

Add a comment...



melenierussell FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, becciolcott, fayeheion, led50.ru, louisa_chambers, book_and_toot, garypowell and vns_dolphins like this

melenierussell #dolphin #wallpaper #aliensexclub #johnwalter

Add a comment...



ryanc0nn0ily FOLLOW

twopeacocks, tiffanytrybus69, paujoyce_, nicketatipo, mmmmaarrcccoooss, souad_boumiz and krokogheya like this

ryanc0nn0ily #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



ryanc0nn0ily FOLLOW

twopeacocks, tiffanytrybus69, paujoyce_, jordanjoshalewis, lemonicest and cloodna.murphy like this

ryanc0nn0ily #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



tiny_thief_ FOLLOWING

24 likes

7w

tiny_thief_ Boy moves fast, today. With @kuba_ryniewicz and @cloodna.murphy #regiam #onset #aliensexclub

Add a comment...

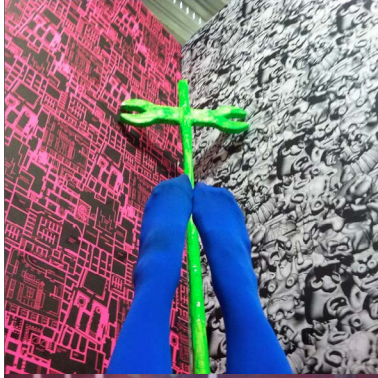


kindsaaaay FOLLOW

dimalatsenko, wav3length, textliebird, ashleyjaneart, willtrunk, openthedoorvents, nickmatos, jsilvaveloso and _alexhphil like this

kindsaaaay Found: thing that makes you go 'ooh...' #ig_europe #ig_artistry #london #citylife #streetlife #pockham #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



ash_feritto FOLLOWING

29 likes

7w

ash_feritto Down by the gene river #AlienSexClub

garypowell Have you been sero sorting? twopeacocks #spermwashing @ash_feritto gina123gina Opaque as fuck ash_feritto @garypowell diggin' on the twinks ash_feritto @gina123gina

Add a comment...



stillmisbehavin FOLLOW

31 likes

7w

stillmisbehavin Just had my tarot read by the uncannily accurate and enlightening Barbara #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



clarisamartini FOLLOW

twopeacocks, diamondinthesky20 and 7w toisaalex like this

clarisamartini You know you're back in LDN when #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



mikazahn FOLLOW

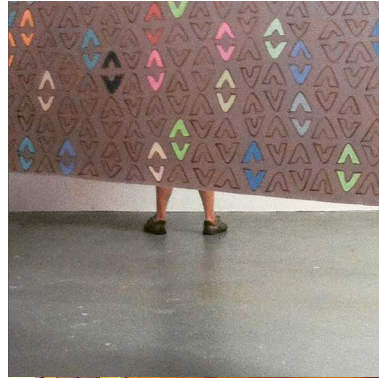
twopeacocks, theunequivocalmike, aclearna_, gemmakgraham, _justufmohamed_, tuttelino, ___chiego___ and mfi80 like this

mikazahn Random sign seen from the bus this morning #aliensexclub #gottalovelondon

Add a comment...



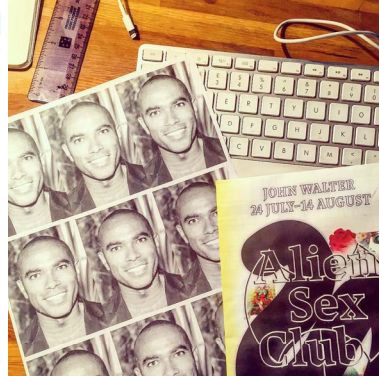
christordine FOLLOW
twopeacocks, c_dyckhoff, ashley_joiner and summercelsawinkler like this
christordine #aliensexclub #club #hubb #glorygoal



ash_ferito FOLLOWING
24 likes
ash_ferito #AlienSexClub



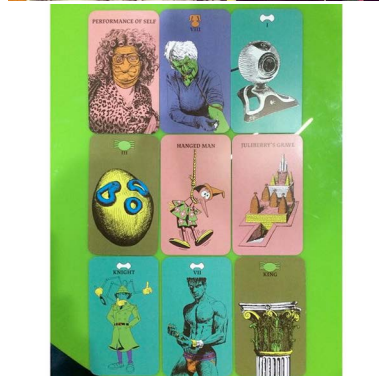
thisisnikiruselll Ambika P3 FOLLOW
twopeacocks, jeryyolaf, anamigram, youbyun, darkwingstvq, credarenee, ash_ferito and jonathan_baldock like this
thisisnikiruselll #TarotReading #JohnWalter #AlienSexClub



verachok FOLLOWING
twopeacocks, tomblyth, arnaud.blonde!, annasulan and littlemismandu like this
verachok Isn't my HIV expert lush? Making a real live appearance in my show this Saturday, Dr Michael Brady #aliensexclub



vogliart FOLLOWING
twopeacocks, pollockmaryanne, jdoctroff, jcast01, ash_ferito and garyjpowell like this
vogliart John Walters #aliensexclub show exploring HIV the arts and another world! Fabulous!



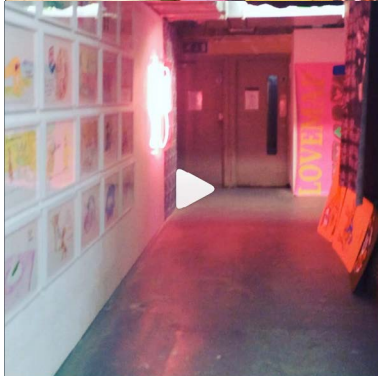
anthonyblakemore FOLLOW
11 likes
anthonyblakemore I had a tarot card reading today and these were my cards - thank you for refreshing my soul, Barbara (@hclaytonwright) #AlienSexClub



anthonyblakemore FOLLOW
19 likes
anthonyblakemore Look at how happy I am @hclaytonwright #AlienSexClub hclaytonwright



verachok FOLLOWING
twopeacocks, littlemismandu, saffcakes, annasulan, Joe_w_ and nicwassell like this
verachok Oh look. She's gone and made another zine. #AlienSexClub



joan_dawk FOLLOW
twopeacocks, twenty4seven, annikins89, moon_shine_sparkle, neonmf and garyjpowell like this
joan_dawk Inside Alien Sex Club with @moon_shine_sparkle #aliensexclub #westminster #university #exhibition #artist #johnwaller #pink #neonlight #illustration #installation #art #music #sound #video #clip #london



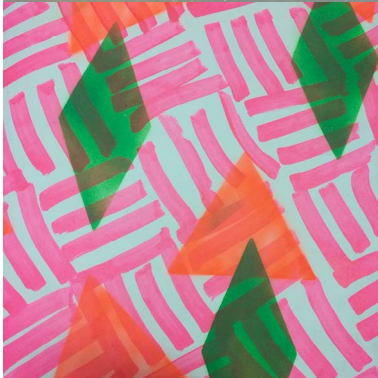
joan_dawk FOLLOW
13 likes
joan_dawk Dame Edna #aliensexclub #art #exhibition #digital #illustration #dameedna #artist #johnwaller #westminster #london



joan_dawk
12 likes
joan_dawk Cats & Cook #allensexclub #exhibition #art #illustration #cards #cat #breakingbad #artist #johnwalter #westminster #london



joan_dawk
twopeacocks, cfn_art, graeme_lavery, monthlycollage, stephaniagomez, ash_ferito, garypowell, rchelsulart and morgannillerphoto like this
joan_dawk Close up #allensexclub #exhibition #art #illustration #colours #green #yellow #print #collage #artist #johnwalter #westminster #london monthlycollage



joan_dawk
20 likes
joan_dawk Close up #allensexclub #exhibition #art #pattern #sketchbook #illustration #colours #pink #green #orange #shapes #line #artist #johnwalter #westminster #london charlesrezandi



verachok
twopeacocks, kevindday, littlemismandu, saffacakes, th7838, annasulan, Joe_w_, cineschneider, just_hortense and selenatoday_ like this
verachok "Vera, what are all those massive batteries for? A giant vibrator?" "Mayyybe" #allensexclub



catrionaclayson
twopeacocks, littlemorag, jantoretjensen and jonesthemag like this
catrionaclayson Jacket potatoes #allensexclub amaz!



jakubdolejs
14 likes
jakubdolejs Tarot reader Barbara from the amazing #allensexclub Congrats @twopeacocks



garypowell
twopeacocks, helayonwright, nublich, shericson and drewateandate like this
garypowell What does the future hold for Belle? Specialist three-card tarot reading by Barbara Truvada at #allensexclub



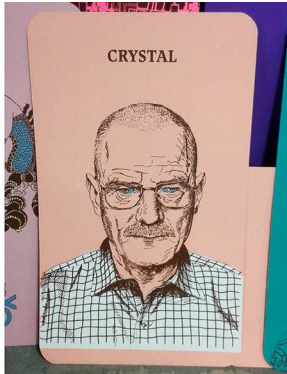
rebeccayeeo
11 likes
rebeccayeeo I got #HIV tested today. Instantaneous results as opposed to the 2 week wait I went through last in SA. Performed by none other than UK's leading HIV expert Dr Michael Brady. Part of a playful exhibition #allensexclub Spot performance maker @verachok's zine for #These12ThingsAreTrue



thisislizchan
twopeacocks, verachok, littlemismandu and rebeccayeeo like this
thisislizchan Beautiful @rebeccayeeo kicking off #these12thingsaretrue created for us by @mrsing @verachok as part of #allensexclub



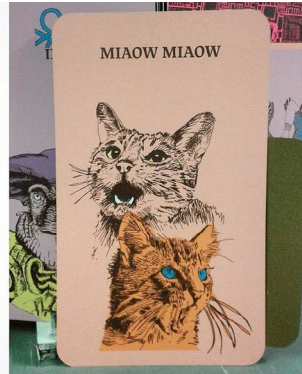
rebeccayeeo
20 likes
rebeccayeeo A snapshot of some very happy memories of play + performance making with these generous and wonderfully talented friends and theatre makers. I feel incredibly humbled to be part of the process of discovery, curiosity, creation & cheeky romp through #These12ThingsAreTrue by the amazing @verachok for #allensexclub by British artist John Walter. Best of all, I get to work with these lovely friends... @thisislizchan Gloria Sanders and Adrian Gillott. #countingmyblessings #allthebeovestru



nigel_grimmer Ambika P3 FOLLOW

30 likes 6w
nigel_grimmer Walter White Tarot Card #aliensexclub #ambikap3gallery #johnwalter #hiv #fineart #gallery #tarot #tarotcards #instagay #gaygram #gay #breakingbad #waterwhite #meth #crystal

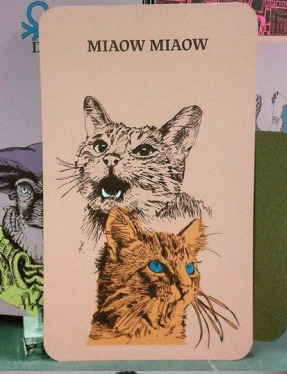
Add a comment...



nigel_grimmer Ambika P3 FOLLOW

23 likes 6w
nigel_grimmer Miaow Miaow Tarot Card #aliensexclub #ambikap3gallery #johnwalter #hiv #fineart #gallery #tarot #tarotcards #instagay #gaygram #gay #cats #screenprint #miaow #drugs #club #pussycat aaronbailey16 @arnabergen

Add a comment...



kirbygerhold Ambika P3 FOLLOW

11 likes 6w
kirbygerhold Miaow Miaow Tarot Card #aliensexclub #ambikap3gallery #johnwalter #hiv #fineart #gallery #tarot #tarotcards #instagay #gaygram #gay #cats #screenprint #miaow #drugs #club #pussycat

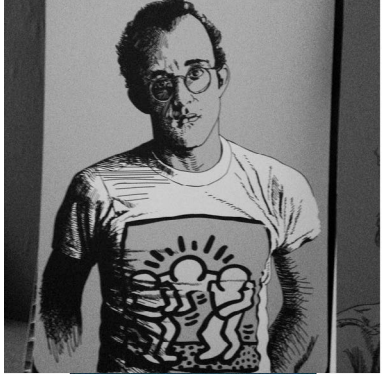
Add a comment...



nigel_grimmer Ambika P3 FOLLOW

27 likes 6w
nigel_grimmer Our Gail Tarot Card #aliensexclub #ambikap3gallery #johnwalter #hiv #fineart #gallery #tarot #tarotcards #instagay #gaygram #gay #coronationstreet #corrie #gallitsley #galplatt #soappera #screenprint

Add a comment...



steve_curley Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, sofiafaz1227, flavianery_via, jamesjonesmusic, mekonmangredew, fanboyco and arthampton like this
steve_curley #keithhoring #aliensexclub
twopeacocks I missed you!
@steve_curley see you soon xxxx
steve_curley @twopeacocks yeah I was looking out for you! Great show John, congratulations xx
twopeacocks Thanks @steve_curley lets meet for a drink soon x x

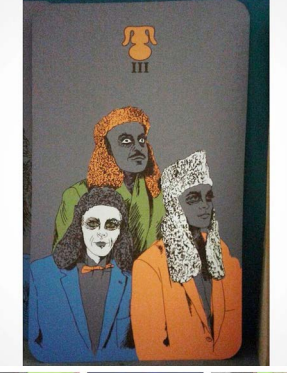
Add a comment...



iamsamashby Ambika P3 FOLLOW

25 likes 6w
iamsamashby Had a tarot reading from the beautiful Barbara aka @hclaytonwright at the AlienSexClub today. Amazing insights via Daniela Westbrook's deviated septum and Disney's Frozen.
hclaytonwright
p.m:acg two of my fav people in the same room!

Add a comment...



nigel_grimmer Ambika P3 FOLLOW

29 likes 6w
nigel_grimmer General Idea Tarot Card #aliensexclub #ambikap3gallery #johnwalter #hiv #fineart #gallery #tarot #tarotcards #instagay #gaygram #gay #generaidea #abronson #screenprint #cult

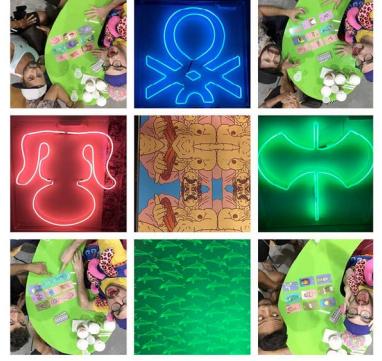
Add a comment...



ash_feritto Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

33 likes 6w
@twopeacocks and my Alien Sex Worker family @hclaytonwright @cococannell @vilde_fuller Hannah and Sue. Obsessed and impressed. #Aliensexclub
ash_feritto And Kat!
twopeacocks The lushest time ever importing you into the Alien Sex Worker program
ganjipowell You can't leave @ash_feritto I've stolen your passport, you're one of coldgold @ash_feritto nice shoesies! cococannell You're amazing! #beauty #hotstuff #Brighton #alien #gin #fonic #foster #art #team #family #friends #fun vilde_fuller Blue Crocs Are Forever! twopeacocks TEAM ALIEN SEX WORKER 4EVA @vilde_fuller @cococannell

Add a comment...



fezfaanana Ambika P3 FOLLOW

20 likes 6w
fezfaanana Jus had the pleasure of experiencing the Alien Sex Club at Ambika P3 by John Walter featuring the masterful tarot card reading of @hclaytonwright #AliensexClub
stillimisbehavin Babs is very enlightening isn't she?
twopeacocks Love this pic! Thanks for coming @fezfaanana x John

Add a comment...



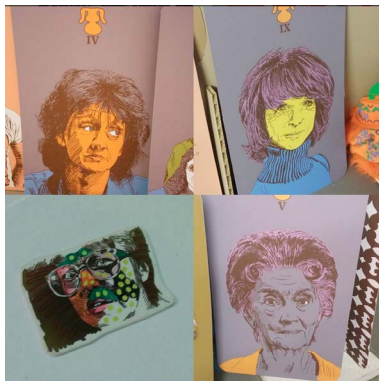
sidreen Ambika P3 FOLLOW

twopeacocks, tulisa_p, noorjadoo, sidday, sanahimram, ash_feritto, thesadspaghetti, nooreemism and viklebow like this
sidreen #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



nigel_grimmer
Ambika P3
38 likes
nigel_grimmer Alien Sex Club Inflatable #aliensexclub #fambikap3gallery #johnwater #hiv #fineart #gallery #tarot #instagay #gaygram #gay #art #inflatable #balloon #sculpture



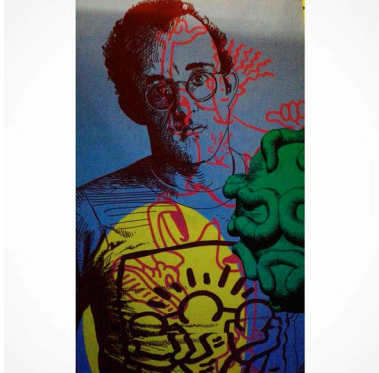
misterjoergensen
23 likes
misterjoergensen #aliensexclub



misterjoergensen
twopeacocks, tom.ak.no, jenniedalgrén, beamn, rbarone, freddiemerola, jonathanvelardi and richieboy77 like this
misterjoergensen #Soho #aliensexclub



nigel_grimmer
35 likes
nigel_grimmer The Writing on the Wall #aliensexclub #fambikap3gallery #johnwater #hiv #fineart #gallery #instagay #gaygram #gay #sausage #orangesarenottheonlyfruits #mural #painting #design #typography #lettering anerblog Nice



nigel_grimmer
32 likes
nigel_grimmer Keith Haring/Fido Dido #aliensexclub #fambikap3gallery #johnwater #hiv #fineart #gallery #instagay #gaygram #gay #keithharing #fido dido #popart #screenprint #popculture fanboyco



anthonyblakemore
27 likes
anthonyblakemore Giant #GallPlatt #TarotCard at #AlienSexClub twopeacocks Put my cards down @anthonyblakemore ! anthonyblakemore @twopeacocks



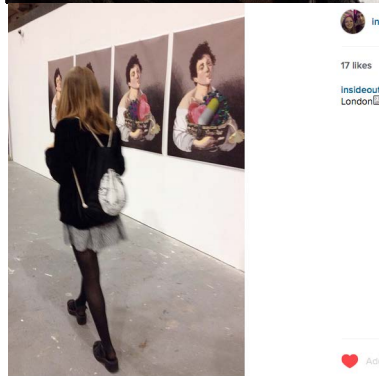
anthonyblakemore
24 likes
anthonyblakemore Giant #MelB #BoSelecta #TarotCard at #AlienSexClub adoreaboy So pretty



twopeacocks
20 likes
twopeacocks A visit from graphic designer @jordanmys... to #aliensexclub yesterday who showed us his recent #keithharing #tattoo fanboyco



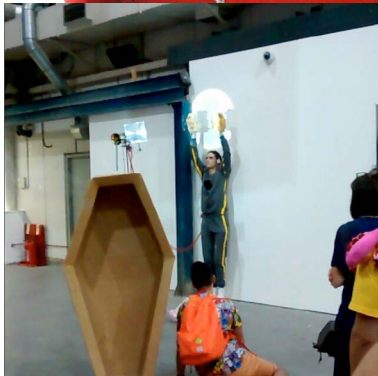
anthonyblakemore
21 likes
anthonyblakemore Giant #DanielleWestbrook #TarotCard at #AlienSexClub lizandseen Hahaas



insideoutinturmilli
17 likes
insideoutinturmilli gallery expeditions in London #aliensexclub #artists



enclaveprojects
Camberwell C... FOLLOWING
12 likes 6w
enclaveprojects An #Aliensexclub in #camberwell
Add a comment...



vilte_fuller
Ambika P3 FOLLOWING
12 likes 5w
vilte_fuller I'm so making finger puppets tonight. #Aliensexclub #timsponner
Add a comment...



alys_williams
Ambika P3 FOLLOWING
14 likes 5w
twopeacocks, edwordk, lauramclarine, spotbot, joeffetcher, hattyorris, gjdelson, markscottwood and jonathan_baldeck like this
alys_williams #Aliensexclub #JohnWalter #Ambika_P3 @twopeacocks @aliensexclub @ambika_p3
Add a comment...



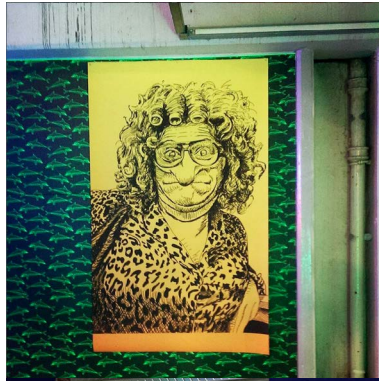
alys_williams
Ambika P3 FOLLOWING
14 likes 5w
twopeacocks, edwordk, lauramclarine, spotbot, joeffetcher, hattyorris, gjdelson, markscottwood and jonathan_baldeck like this
alys_williams #Aliensexclub #JohnWalter #Ambika_P3 @twopeacocks @aliensexclub @ambika_p3
Add a comment...



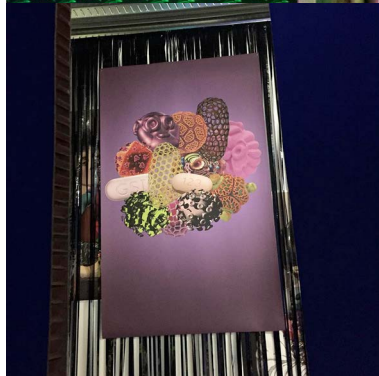
castaboysspella
FOLLOW
18 likes 5w
castaboysspella #Aliensexclub #JohnWalter #AmbikaP3London #FROZEN #QueenDeath
Add a comment...



castaboysspella
FOLLOW
17 likes 5w
castaboysspella #Aliensexclub #johnwalter castaboysspella #AmbikaP3 #London
Add a comment...



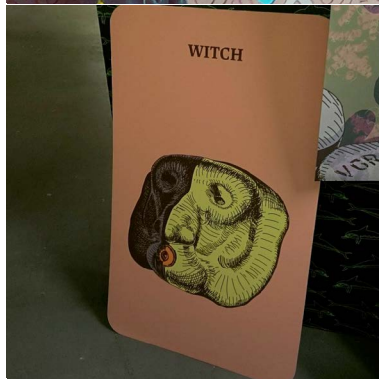
tulisa_p
Alien Sex Club FOLLOW
twopeacocks, sodunnoyo, reuben_lp, melbournentrepreneur and nelson_clothing like this
tulisa_p Great Exhibition: Crab Paste #MeIB #Aliensexclub #JohnWalter
sodunnoyo Ironic:
tulisa_p #Genius @sodunnoyo if you get a chance to go. GO! Plus you get a free HIV test which is a boon.
sodunnoyo @tulisa_p that's all I look for in an exhibition ngl
tulisa_p @sodunnoyo Oh same. If there's no clinic, then I ain't buying.
Add a comment...



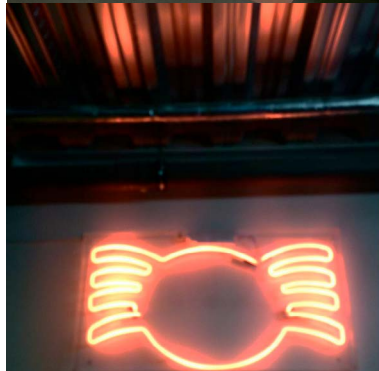
alys_williams
Ambika P3 FOLLOW
twopeacocks, edwordk, charleslutz, lauramclarine, spotbot, jonathan_trayte, seekthesublime, kristinhelegjerod, markscottwood and jonathan_baldeck like this
alys_williams Amazing! #Aliensexclub #JohnWalter @twopeacocks @aliensexclub @ambika_p3
Add a comment...



alys_williams
Ambika P3 FOLLOW
14 likes 5w
alys_williams #TimSponner #Performance #ChemicalEvents #Aliensexclub #JohnWalter #Ambika_P3 @twopeacocks @aliensexclub @ambika_p3 @Timsponner jonathan_baldeck Bloody brilliant! emmacousin Love it - well done Tim!
Add a comment...



castaboysspella
FOLLOW
21 likes 5w
castaboysspella #Witch #Poiroh #HIV #SexualHealth #Aliensexclub #AmbikaP3London www.aliensexclub.com
Add a comment...



castaboysspella
FOLLOW
20 likes 5w
castaboysspella #Aliensexclub #johnwalter #SexualHealth #Bug #PublicLice #FuckingCrabs #NeonPublicLice #AmbikaP3
Add a comment...

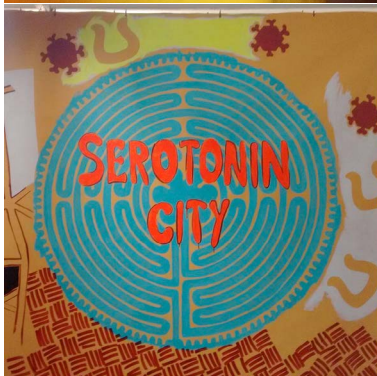


castaboyaspella FOLLOW

22 likes
castaboyaspella #WelcomeToTheClub #AlienSexClub #AlienSexClubLondon #JohnWalter #ExploringARelationshipBetweenHWAndTo daysOfSexCulture #AmbikaP3 #LiverpoolHomotopia

castaboyaspella FOLLOW

24 likes
castaboyaspella #OneSizeFitsAll #AlienSexClubLondon #JohnWalter #Aliensexclub.com #London #AmbikaP3 #LiverpoolHomotopia



studio189london FOLLOW

twopeacocks, Janet14, the_beety_board, sabinandron, samjddg, e_m_d_w, art_of_miljane_harris and sator199 like this

studio189london From the Alien Sex Club exhibition at @ambika_p3, trippy exploration of visual culture the contemporary representation of AIDS, on until 14 August #aliensexclub #londonart #londonexhibitions #serotonincity

insideovertumroll FOLLOW

21 likes
insideovertumroll getting our tarot cards read #tarot #aliensexclub #duggydeee Where is this? #spirituallydope nice!!

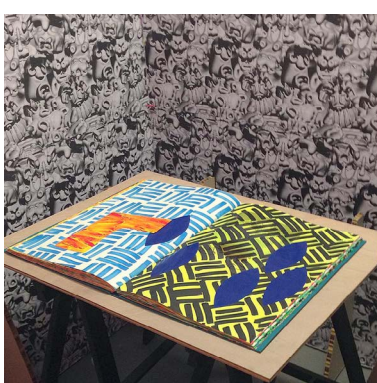
twopeacocks, @duggydeee ambika p3, ends Friday! www.aliensexclub.com



studioponto Ambika P3 FOLLOW

15 likes
studioponto Just had the chance to explore John Walter's brilliant Alien Sex Club. Go get lost in the maze at Ambika P3 Gallery in London, ends Friday! It was great to be involved thanks @twopeacocks #aliensexclub

twopeacocks Couldn't have done it without you @studioponto so good to see you xxx



whitecubicle Ambika P3 FOLLOWING

28 likes
whitecubicle Today is the last day of #JohnWalter's #AlienSexClub! Open from 12-6 today. Don't miss it!

twopeacocks Last day is Friday! Just last weekend! Thanks for sharing xxxxx

whitecubicle Whoops! Take the day to see it today anyway! Don't risk missing it!

whitecubicle @twopeacocks
aa_bronson Is this an interactive work?

whitecubicle @aa_bronson this is part of a giant interactive exhibition!

aa_bronson I guess my question is, is it a working sex club?

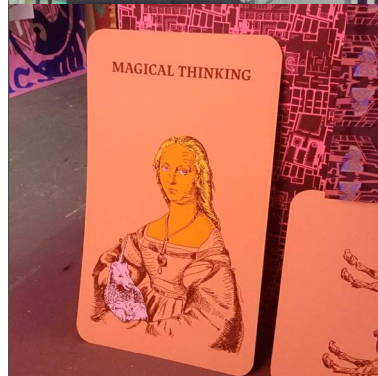
mrgraemeilott FOLLOW

twopeacocks, e_m_d_w, renatakespictures, glritheparty and vite_fuller like this

mrgraemeilott Getting myself on that guest list!! Coming @sazzebum @_the_lady_k_?? #euston #aliensexclub #guestlist #curious

twopeacocks Come soon! Ends Friday

vite_fuller @cat_hollinshead



castaboyaspella FOLLOW

34 likes
castaboyaspella #MagicalThinking #getMeI through! #eYay #More #JohnWalter #AlienSexClub #London #AmbikaP3London

twopeacocks #YouGottaReachForTheUmic orlnside/you

castaboyaspella @twopeacocks <3 D litappette Nice

cococannell FOLLOWING

twopeacocks, joyallen___, dustyshell, e_m_d_w, snapskies and vite_fuller like this

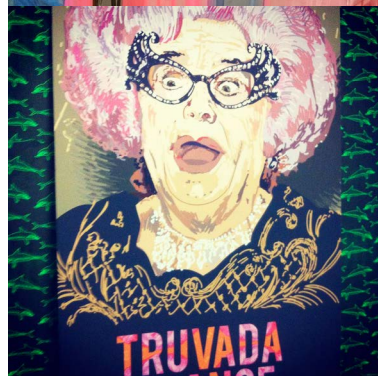
cococannell #aliensexclub #prep #curtain #cruise #maze



dquanny Ambika P3 FOLLOW

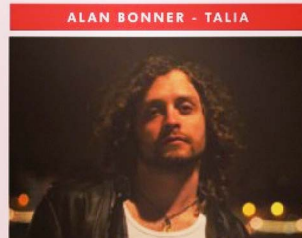
twopeacocks, renatakespictures, jofusawit and lillibee like this

dquanny Tonight's entertainment #aliensexclub #wednesday Exhibition





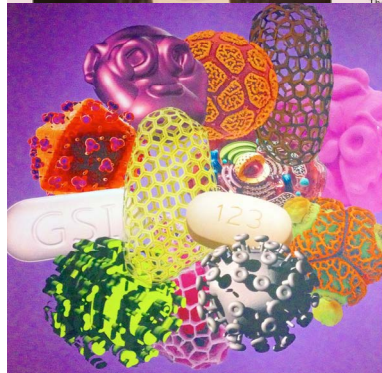
callumleughes Ambika P3 FOLLOW
twopeacocks, renatakespictures, bodybagsmalone, marie_eaina_smith, _salad_, blacklist_ed, _darv, e_m_d_w, immames, and lauralguy like this
callumleughes #AlienSexClub



alenbonner FOLLOW
twopeacocks, renatakespictures, hcc100, petrarcae, Jaylousto and louise_mccalister_jewels like this
alenbonner Got me some unexpected praise in QX magazine this week. Thanks to the lovely Pat Cash ahead of my appearance at Alien Sex Club tonight 6.30 at Ambika P3
#letsstalkaboutgaysexanddrugs #aliensexclub #ambikap3 #alenbonner #gay #music #performance #qcx #qcxmagazine #review
We've bumped weren't Bonnie Toli piano and dr But in Bon first la this wh worria And this rev in their 'Jas dressir of pas while t next cl 'Cc throug he sing table / my thir



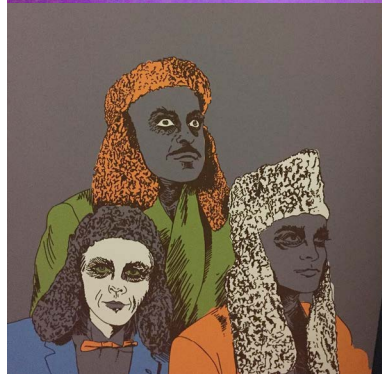
gridwall FOLLOWING
18 likes
gridwall Only two days left to see #aliensexclub at @ambika_p3. Don't miss it!



renatakespictures Ambika P3 FOLLOW
twopeacocks, manyfisherart, gareekie, cashook, snowstormlondon, ahoychrispineda, e_m_d_w, marinareina, markscottwood and richardmaione like this
renatakespictures PURPLE PILLZ #aliensexclub #exhibition #liv #igtb #art



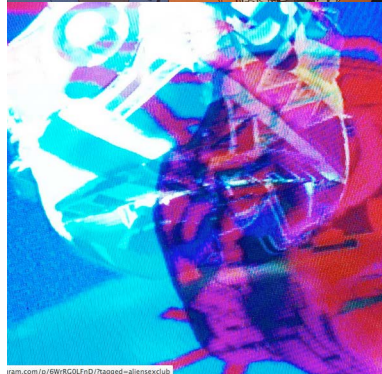
gridwall FOLLOWING
24 likes
gridwall Tomorrow is the last chance to see John Walter's exhibition #aliensexclub in London



gluck Ambika P3 FOLLOW
twopeacocks, renatakespictures, aronsanthy, mdkgiraudeau, thilsenkissell, e_m_d_w and paintingasart like this
gluck #aliensexclub #generalidea



whitecubicle Ambika P3 FOLLOWING
14 likes
whitecubicle LAST DAY of #ALIENSEXCLUB today!



ashley_joiner FOLLOW
26 likes
ashley_joiner #aliensexclub #sauna #johnwater #art #hiv



djstewartwho FOLLOW
twopeacocks, hannolondon, peejayholloway, howardthegreat, loganbertolotti, e_m_d_w, howardscriman and bisaiimi like this
djstewartwho Detail from an artwork at John Walter's brilliant #AlienSexClub - 'exploring the relationship between visual culture & HIV today'.



renatakespictures Ambika P3 FOLLOW
14 likes
renatakespictures I TOLD THE WITCH DOCTOR I WAS IN LOVE WITH YOU #aliensexclub #igtb #hiv #art #exhibition #london #pink #johnwater



krystal.wang_ Baker Street 221B... FOLLOW
twopeacocks, ziq_guo, tigerblueee, doreenn_xoxw, sandraskonst, _write_away, ffangss, 2015pipi and silvia_anna like this
krystal.wang_ #aliensexclub donkey1220 [👍] [👍] mcioly @krystal_7cc cool! @michaexcheng



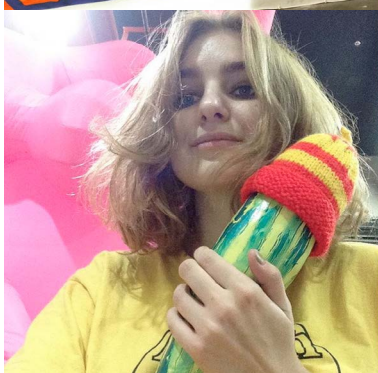
mj_hewitt FOLLOW
twopeacocks, msblancadiana, maryfisherart, russturk, adrianhansel, artaid.world, mckeeesteeplus and rebeccalsbeth like this
mj_hewitt #AlienSexClub #AmbikaP3 #JohnWalter #London #art #1V #P#EP adrianhansel Awwwww John Walter



mj_hewitt FOLLOW
twopeacocks, maryfisherart, adrianhansel, getsJunky, mckeeesteeplus and rebeccalsbeth like this
mj_hewitt #AlienSexClub #JohnWalter #AmbikaP3 #London #art #HIV #P#EP



mj_hewitt FOLLOW
13 likes
mj_hewitt FYI: #AlienSexClub #AmbikaP3 #JohnWalter #London #art #HIV #P#EP



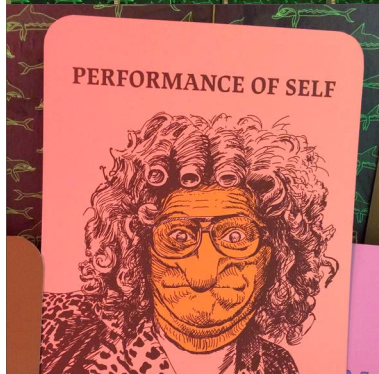
vite_fuller FOLLOWING
23 likes
vite_fuller End of #aliensexclub in London. Help find this marrow's sibling! #MarrowAmnesty



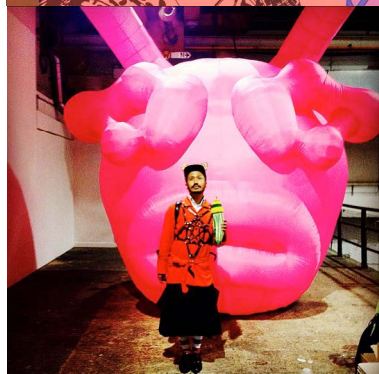
mj_hewitt FOLLOW
twopeacocks, maryfisherart and artaid.world like this
mj_hewitt Finally made it to #JohnWalter's #AlienSexClub at #AmbikaP3 just before it closes. Brilliantly bonkers but with a powerful message underlying it all. #HIV #P#EP



mj_hewitt FOLLOW
twopeacocks, msblancadiana, maryfisherart, dameednaofficial, getsJunky, artaid.world, mckeeesteeplus, thejamesmart, rebeccalsbeth and kaj91983 like this
mj_hewitt Cameo by @dameednaofficial, #AlienSexClub #JohnWalter #AmbikaP3 #London #art #HIV #P#EP #DameEdna



mj_hewitt FOLLOW
twopeacocks, msblancadiana, maryfisherart, ambika_p3, josephjameseightyix, richardarmatege5, getsJunky and rebeccalsbeth like this
mj_hewitt Complete set of bastards. #AlienSexClub #AmbikaP3 #JohnWalter #London #art #HIV #P#EP



manrutt FOLLOW
53 likes
manrutt "Alien Sex Club" giving a talk at the Ambika P3 exhibition last night. Thank you Pat Cash for your warm welcoming and let me be part of your community. And thank you all for sharing your life stories. #many #manrutt #manruttwangkeaw #dancingfashion #fashioninmotion #fashion #dance #art #style #styling #stylist #menstyle #menswear #menfashion #meninskit #skirt #cyberdog #zanabayne #224 #paulsmith #commesdesgarcons #doverstreetmarket #aliensexclub #patcash #johnwalter



freya_robin FOLLOW
twopeacocks, margaridatsantos, jennycasee and bbser like this
freya_robin Tarrt readings from the Alien Sex Maze #aliensexclub #westminster

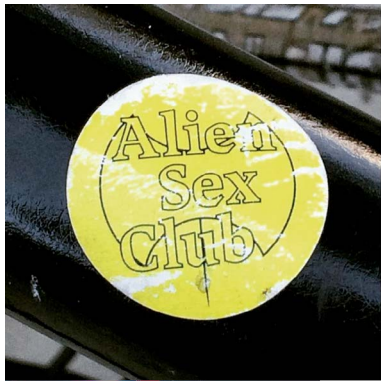


jkar
Ambika P3

12 likes

jkar Confession booth
#aliensexclub #artstudents #art #contemporaryart #videoart #confession #AmbikaP3 #JohnWalter #B #exhibition #gallery #nofilter #beauty #purple

Add a comment...



garypowell

twopeacocks, drewataandsto, coccocannell, ludasing and gardenerwill56 like this

garypowell Facing like a flower in London #aliensexclub but soon to blossom again in Liverpool #photopia

Add a comment...



prodigalshawm

twopeacocks, djblavatsky and lomajussi like this

prodigalshawm #aliensexclub #fuckmeagalactic

Add a comment...



helloyesthisjay

twopeacocks, mojmuj, pesterandrossi, jekyllist, lam_a_blob_, inkyllio, kuthanar, aquapark and surprisingydope like this

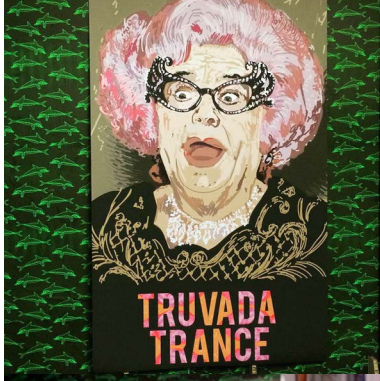
helloyesthisjay #aliensexclub #art #london #blob #pink

betherules

aquapark Génial j

surprisingydope Selfie

Add a comment...



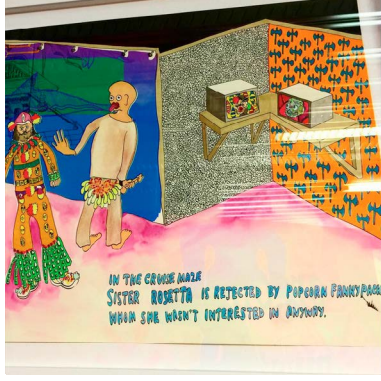
lgbtcenter

18 likes

lgbtcenter #Repost @ilamrez

Truvada Trance by Artist John Walter @twopeacocks - Amazing exhibition exploring the relationship between visual culture and HIV @ambika_p3 #GayCulture #InstaGay #Truvada #AlienSexClub #Maximalism #London #HIV #FarotCards #LaterGram #BeTheGeneration derek_miller

Add a comment...



6wtattocs

twopeacocks and vjugamab like this

6wtattocs #aliensexclub

Add a comment...



danny_k
Ambika P3

349 likes

danny_k I was right at the opening of #aliensexclub (@twopeacocks) at @ambikap3 such a mass amount of mediums curated perfectly acesandqueens I saw this at Baker Street right? @danny_k eleazarsho Amazing style! hadrienstar Hair colour on point

Add a comment...

Appendix 5
Press Releases for Alien Sex Club at Ambika P3

This appendix supports *The Making of Alien Sex Club* - chapter 5 - relating to the discussion of traversing thresholds. It contains two versions of the press release for the installation at Ambika P3, the first of which was highly contested, which I discuss.

PRESS RELEASE – 23 January 2015

Alien Sex Club

An exhibition by John Walter

aliensexclub.com aliensexclub@gmail.com



LONDON 24 July – 14 August 2015 Ambika P3 Gallery 35 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS Open Wednesday – Friday 11-7pm Saturday – Sunday 12-6pm

LIVERPOOL 30 October – 1 December 2015 Homotopia, venue to be announced Open Thursday – Sunday 12-6pm

Alien Sex Club is a major multimedia project by British artist **John Walter**, which will explore the relationship between visual culture and HIV today. Alien Sex Club will use the spatial device of the cruise maze to bring together works that address the complex subject of contemporary sexual health. The exhibition will consist of a large-scale installation based on the shapes of cruise mazes, found in sex clubs and gay saunas. It will comprise sculpture, painting, video, performance and installation. Visitors will be immersed in a multisensory world in which they can watch videos and live performances, get lost in the maze and have food and drink in the performance bar. Alien Sex Club will use popular forms including hospitality, fortune-telling, comedy and the aesthetic of carnivals and festivals to introduce issues to a wide audience and make the subject palatable, interesting and fun, while

grounding it in current scientific research.

Walter's exhibition contends that Post-Minimal art lacks the social and popular outlook necessary for addressing today's HIV syndemic, which involves not only the virus but also the social and cultural constructs responsible for the increase in infection rates. Instead, a maximalist approach enables visitors to engage with the issues at hand through a combination of aesthetic, social and medical elements.

Alien Sex Club will involve **artists, activists and HIV specialists, clinical academics and scientists** in collaborations for a public programme of talks and performances that will provide audiences with a new vocabulary for understanding and talking about HIV and the factors contributing to its transmission. The

public programme will be free to visitors. The architectural installation will also offer visitors **free rapid HIV testing** facilitated by Terence Higgins Trust.

The project is grounded in a collaboration between Walter and **Dr Alison Rodger**, Senior Lecturer and Honorary Consultant in Infectious Diseases and HIV at University College London, and it is supported by a Small Arts Award from the Wellcome Trust.

Background and context for the project

- During the early AIDS crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, many public sex environments (often including cruise mazes) were closed by law. More recently, cruising for sex has moved online with apps such as Grindr, Scruff and Hornet gaining in popularity. However, many men still want to meet in person and anonymously for sex, despite the risks involved.
- Gay men remain one of the groups most at risk of HIV in the UK, with 3,250 new cases of the infection diagnosed in this group in 2013. Anti-retroviral therapy (ART) helps HIV-positive patients stay healthy with near normal life expectancy but the long-term physical effects of ART are still unknown and its long-term cost is of increasing concern. It is estimated that ART costs around £500,000 per person for a lifetime of treatment.
- Popular debate around the medical and social implications of ART and HIV in this country is set to increase in the next year, as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and self-testing for HIV will become more available in the UK, changing how people think about risk and unprotected sex.

The project travels to Liverpool in Autumn 2015, where it will be part of the Homotopia festival. **John Walter** (born 1978, Dartford) works in a range of media including drawing, painting, performance, video, music and sculpture. His installations are grounded in theoretical and empirical research, and they seduce

visitors into engaging with complex and often uncomfortable subjects such as sexual health through his exuberant use of colour, humour and hospitality. Walter creates fictions that begin with his personal experience and quote the voices of others, weaving them together into new epic works. The term 'Maximalist', which best describes his work, refers to an additive practice that values the relationships between things rather than their qualities in isolation. Walter's work is visually intricate, returning to specific lexicons of imagery such as tarot cards, which allow meanings to develop within multiple contexts. He is currently undertaking research for Alien Sex Club as part of an AHRC funded PhD in the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at the University of Westminster.

A PROJECT BY John Walter

CURATED BY Ellen Mara De Wachter

PARTNERS Arts Council England Wellcome Trust The University of Westminster
AmbikaP3

Homotopia Terence Higgins Trust Arts & Humanities Research Council



PRESS RELEASE – 4 February 2015

Alien Sex Club

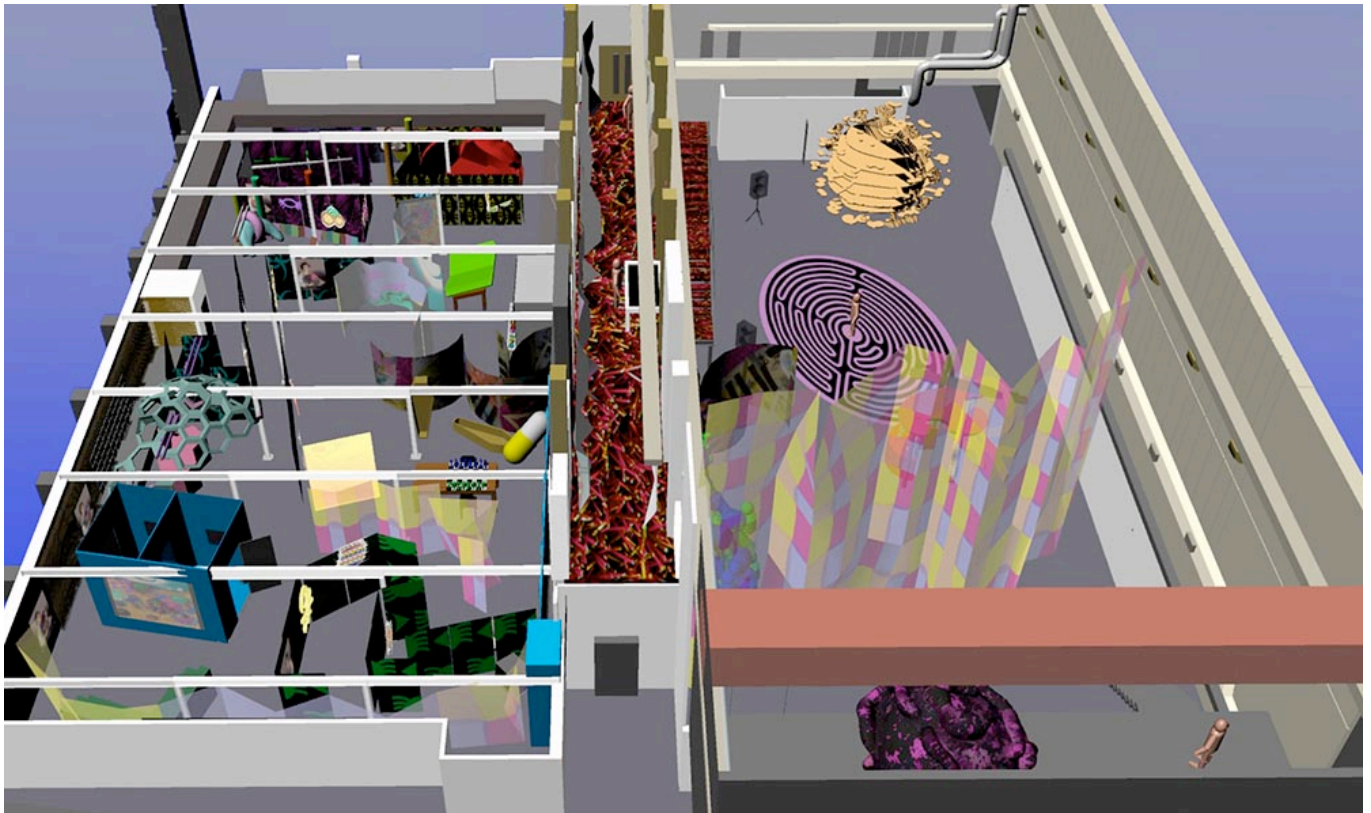
An exhibition by John Walter



aliensexclub.com

aliensexclub@gmail.com

@aliensexclub



John Walter, Computer-generated model of Alien Sex Club, 2015

LONDON

24 July – 14 August 2015

Ambika P3

35 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS

Open Wednesday – Friday 11-7pm

Saturday – Sunday 12-6pm

LIVERPOOL

30 October – 1 December 2015

Homotopia, venue to be announced

Open Thursday – Sunday 12-6pm

Alien Sex Club is a major multimedia project by British artist **John Walter**, which will explore the relationship between visual culture and HIV today. Alien Sex Club will use the spatial device of the cruise maze to bring together works that address the complex subject of contemporary sexual health. The exhibition will consist of a large-scale installation based on the shapes of cruise mazes, found in sex clubs and gay saunas. It will comprise sculpture, painting, video, performance and installation. Visitors will be immersed in a multisensory world in which they can watch videos and live performances, get lost in the maze and have food and drink in the performance bar.

Alien Sex Club will use popular forms including hospitality, fortune-telling, comedy and the aesthetic of carnivals and festivals to introduce issues to a wide audience and make the subject palatable, interesting and fun, while grounding it in cross-disciplinary research. The project is part of Walter's AHRC funded PhD at the University of Westminster and will be shown at Ambika P3, the University's exhibition space in central London. His research in epidemiology is grounded in a collaboration between Walter and **Dr Alison Rodger**, Senior Lecturer and Honorary Consultant in Infectious Diseases and HIV at University College London, supported by a Small Arts Award from the Wellcome Trust.

Alien Sex Club will involve **artists, activists and HIV specialists, clinical academics and scientists** in collaborations for a public programme of talks and performances that will provide audiences with a new vocabulary for understanding and talking about HIV and the factors contributing to its transmission. The public programme will be free to visitors. The architectural installation will also offer visitors **free rapid HIV testing** facilitated by Terence Higgins Trust.

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Notes to editors

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A PROJECT BY

John Walter

CURATED BY

Ellen Mara De Wachter

PARTNERS

University of Westminster

Ambika P3

Homotopia

Terence Higgins Trust

FUNDING

Arts & Humanities Research Council

Arts Council England

Wellcome Trust

Alien Sex Club Supporters



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Supported by
wellcometrust



UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER

homotopia



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