

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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The texts in this book and all to which they refer are informed by the AIDS crisis. Though I have endeavored to lead a rich intellectual life, and I possess many interests, the threat that the epidemic has posed to me and everyone around me has filtered my thinking. The only text in the book that does not bear the burden of AIDS at all is the first essay, "Geography Notes." Written before my awareness of the disease, it provides a glimpse into the preoccupations that preceded my involvement in the crisis. These

concerns were specifically tied to art and aesthetics. They were never abandoned in the work that followed. Rather these interests were given focus and urgency.

There are texts included here that do not directly address AIDS. However, the epidemic animated the ideas from the margins. So total was the burden of illness—mine and others’—that the only viable response, other than to cease making art entirely, was to adjust to the gravity of the predicament by using the crisis as a lens. Indeed, AIDS touches every issue imaginable: sex, love, death, economy, drugs (recreational and medicinal), morals, ethics, representation, and culture.

This collection starts with essays that address formal concerns in a straightforward manner: “Geography Notes,” “Picture a Coalition,” “The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous,” and “Operative Assumptions.” For the most part I have left the earliest writings in this collection untouched, minimally altering only those formulations I now find insufficient. In some cases I have appended footnotes to add new thoughts to an old text. I wanted to retain both the youthful exuberance and the palpable sense of fear in the writing.

A shift occurs toward the middle of the book. The writing takes on a more experimental character, as the prose itself becomes a subject of the texts: “Boat Trip,” “Dense Moments,” “Present Tense,” and a selection from my columns written for the journal *Documents* titled “New York Was Yesterday.” The columns mix fiction and fact. The writing evolves entirely into fiction in “Which Is More Powerful: The Word or the Idea?”

The last third of the volume extends themes that were explored in the beginning. Current events regarding the global AIDS pandemic compelled me to reformulate activist concerns in “What the World Needs Now” and “The Effort to Survive AIDS from the Point of View of a Race-Car Driver.” Invited by *Artforum* to revisit the eighties for their fortieth anniversary issue gave me an opportunity to reexamine the underlying

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ideas of my practice and the history that formed them in “My Postmodernism.” Finally, I wrote the concluding essay—“More Operative Assumptions”—specifically for this book, in order to sum up my theoretical concerns as they have developed to the point of this publication.

There is another point of entry into my writing apart from AIDS. From the beginning of my mature practice—the moment “when I found my voice”—I’ve been engaged by the problems of autobiography. The films of Yvonne Rainer were most influential in this regard. I recall an epiphany watching *The Man Who Envied Women*. I realized that to describe the world around me I had to “cut across” my own subjectivity and submit the “slice” to close scrutiny; kind of like counting the rings of growth on the trunk of a fallen tree. I adopted the method as my own.

Having a disease defines my world, and the disease is a global problem. These are two very different concepts. The first clause describes a subjective condition. The second describes an objective condition. The two clauses can only be bridged through language by using a conjunction. Can the two conditions be joined in the realm of practice? This is no mere exercise. I believe that the key to understanding and fighting the AIDS crisis depends on the conjunction of the subjective experiences of people with AIDS and the objective conditions of the crisis. I have an enormous expectation of prose. I continue to believe that if it can be written then it can be realized.



No writer works alone. I am grateful for the support of many people. First, I would like to thank the editor, James Meyer. I could not imagine working on this collection with any editor other than James Meyer; I trust no one more to edit my writing. Alex Alberro first had the idea for this book. Alex

approached James to edit the collection, and together they made the proposal to The MIT Press. Executive Editor Roger Conover and Assistant Editor Lisa Reeve were generous with their understanding, support, and assistance. Thank you to Editor Judy Feldmann and Designer Emily Gutheinz for their work and expertise. I want to thank Douglas Crimp for writing the foreword and for his friendship. Zoe Leonard contributed a number of her photographs to accompany the selections from “New York Was Yesterday.” It’s a privilege to be able to include them here. The photographs intensify the feelings I wish to evoke with the column and they also mark the presence of a rich and enduring amity between us.

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I want to acknowledge all the editors I worked with in the past who helped me shape the previously published material in this volume: Jack Bankowsky, Julia Bryan-Wilson, Melodie Calvert, Barbara Hunt, Esther Kaplan, Miwon Kwon, Don McMahon, Helen Molesworth, Tom Lawson, Pratibha Parmar, Michael Renov, Rodney Sappington, Tyler Stawlings, Erika Suderberg, and Jennifer Terry.

I want to give a special acknowledgment to Lynne Tillman, who has always encouraged my writing. She was a pillar of support while I compiled this book.

Yvonne Rainer continues to be the model artist for me. Thank you for your example and your friendship.

My family always stands by me. Thank you to my parents Linda and Martin Bordowitz; to my grandparents Max and Gloria Glassman; and to my sister Traci. Sadly, my paternal grandparents and both of their children are gone: Helen and Harry Harstein, my father Les, and my aunt Andrea. I wish you were here for this.

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I am extremely fortunate to have many interlocutors with whom I continue to share ideas. I want to thank you all: Sam Avrett, David Barr, Jean Carlomusto, Yau Ching, Ron Clark, Moyra Davey, Mark Dion, Dan Eisenberg, Richard Elovich, Steve Fagin, Andrea Fraser, Martha Gever, Faye

Ginsberg, John Greyson, Catherine Gund, Mark Harrington, Jill Harris, Bill Horrigan, Omar Karmi, Steve Kurtz, Ernie Larsen, Sherry Millner, Nadja Millner-Larsen, Jennifer Montgomery, Ulrike Müller, Ray Navarro, Craig Owens, Michael Rooks, Abe Rybeck, Jason Simon, Jeffrey Skoller, Peter Staley, Kendall Thomas, Faith Wilding, and Daniel Wolfe.

Thanks to the therapists I have had over the years: Mr. Hoberman, Louis Fourcher, and Mary Doheny. Many of the insights you led me to are contained within the margins. And thank you to my physicians: Dr. Howard Grossman and Dr. John Phair. Your care helped me to remain alive and well enough to continue working.

Thank you to my colleagues and students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Whitney Museum Independent Studio Program. I am grateful for the assistance of Andrea Goldman, Megan Rider, and Paige Sarlin who helped me compile the manuscript and illustrations.

Finally, the greatest portion of my gratitude goes to Claire Pentecost. She read all of my writing before publication. We shared everything for ten years. Every word I uttered aloud was for her ear first.