

## SO, YOU WANT TO PLAN AN ACTION.

We live in tumultuous times. There are culture wars the likes of which we haven't seen since the 1980s. Looming even larger is a pernicious anti-democratic turn—in both the US and abroad—that's instilled a general sense of dread whenever elections approach. Unsurprisingly, there's a strong desire to organize, act, and make positive change. To be the protagonist of an empowering counter-narrative. *Learning from ACT UP: Tactics of Direct Action* is a performative installation—comprised of film, graphics, and archival material—that demonstrate what dogged but peaceful civil disobedience might achieve. How, in fact, it might even change the world.

Our case-study protagonist is ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. Founded in March 1987, ACT UP defined itself as “a diverse, nonpartisan group united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis.” Their first “act” was the adoption of the famed graphic emblem SILENCE=DEATH, printed in white Gill sanserif type underneath a pink triangle on a black background, which came to signify a global community set on confronting the engines of the AIDS crisis: homophobic ideologies, government inaction, and outmoded medical protocols. *Learning from ACT UP*, by focusing on the actions initiated by the founding New York chapter from 1987 to 1993, performatively shows how one might react to a social crisis, reach a broad audience, change the discourse of “business as usual,” and initiate systemic change.

The endgame of systemic change is no small feat. It entails collective organization—the building of a counter institution itself, albeit one that's contingent with no given “leader.” Towards this end, ACT UP held regular Monday night meetings run with Robert's Rules of Order. Agendas were set by the Coordinating Committee. Facilitators ran the meetings moving discussion towards various actions, in coordination with focus committees—Fundraising, Treatment and Data, Majority Action, People of Color, Media, key among them. Simultaneously, other people self-divided into affinity groups not accountable to the larger body. Sarah Schulman recounts in her book *Let the Record Show*, “When the Monday-night general meeting decided to do an action at the FDA, it was organized through the Actions Committee, sitting at the Coordinating Committee. But at the demonstration, individual affinity groups appeared with their own artistic creative expression that no one had approved.”

If this all seems daunting, really, it's not.

Alongside a timeline of other zaps and actions that forced the government and mainstream media to confront the AIDS crisis, *Learning from ACT UP* features *United in Anger: A History of ACT UP*, a documentary that reveals the group's complex culture of meetings, affinity groups, and approaches to civil disobedience, on any given Monday night. Combining archival footage from activists, and interviews from the ACT UP Oral History Project, the film further explores ACT UP from a grassroots perspective and through the planning and execution of major actions including Seize Control of the FDA, Stop the Church, and Day of Desperation. Beating at the heart of *United in Anger* is the simultaneous grief, camp, and sexiness that defined ACT UP's heterodoxical energy, a tenacious life drive intent on slaying the death drive from which the group originated. In these tumultuous times, this is a lesson we must learn from ACT UP.



UC Irvine Claire Trevor  
School of the Arts

**OCTOBER 5 TO  
DECEMBER 14, 2024  
ROOM GALLERY**

## 1 POSTER

### **SILENCE=DEATH Project**

1987

Avram Finkelstein, Brian Howard, Oliver Johnston,  
Charles Krelloff, Chris Li, Jorge Socarrás  
Offset lithograph, sheet  
16/15 21 × 16/9 33 inches  
Courtesy of Jim Hubbard

## 2 NEWSLETTERS

### **ACT UP - TITA (Tell It to ACT UP)**

1990 to 1992

MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power:  
Series X. Published and near Print Material Box 179,  
Folders 6 4. New York Public Library. Archives of  
Sexuality and Gender

### **Committees, Treatment and Data Digest**

1989 to 1994

MS ACT UP: The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power:  
Series VII. Committees Box 62, Folder 5-1. New York  
Public Library. Archives of Sexuality and Gender

## ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

### **ACT UP New York Records**

Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York  
Public Library.

### **Tony Davis ACT UP Records**

Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York  
Public Library.

### **James Wentzy papers**

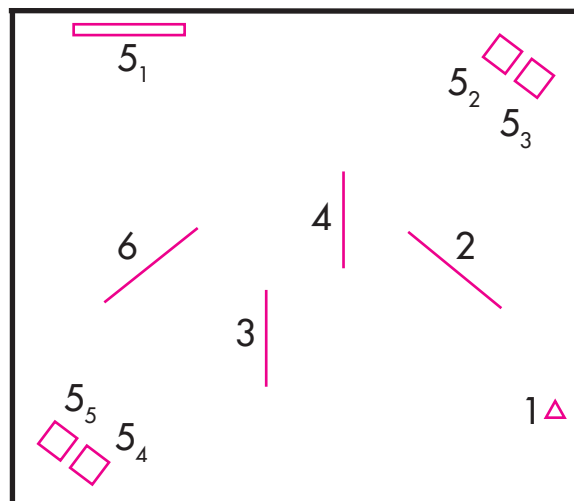
Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York  
Public Library

## 3 PHOTOGRAPHS

Selection of photos from Bob Daugherty, Clay  
Walker, Gran Fury, Lee Snider, Meg Handler,  
Tracey Litt

## 4 PRINTED EPHEMERA

Selection from Gran Fury and the ACT UP New  
York Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division,  
The New York Public Library.



## 5 VIDEOS

### **1 United in Anger: A History of ACT UP**

2012

A film by Jim Hubbard

Produced by Jim Hubbard and Sarah Schulman

Color, digital transfer, 88 minutes

### **2 Changing the Definition of AIDS**

2008

Produced by Jim Hubbard

27 minutes 56 seconds

### **3 Day of Desperation Redux**

AIDS Community Television series

Originally telecast January 1994 ,25

Produced by Alessandro Codagnone

29 minutes 7 seconds

### **4 Kissing Doesn't Kill**

1990

Gran Fury

Color, sound, 2 minutes 18 seconds

### **5 Readings by David Wojnarowicz**

1992

Diva TV

37 minutes 7 seconds

## 6 BOOKS

1. Bad Object-Choices. How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video. Seattle: Bay Press, 1991.
2. Berlant, Lauren. Cruising Utopia, 10th Anniversary Edition: The Then and There of Queer Futurity. Sexual Cultures, no. 50. New York: New York University Press, 2019.
3. Bersani, Leo, Martha Gevers, Jan Zita Grover, Mitchell Karp, and Simon Watney, eds. OCTOBER 43: Art/Theory/Criticism/Politics - Winter 1987: AIDS - Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism. New York: October Magazine, 1987.
4. Brewster, Scott. After Silence: A History of AIDS through Its Images. New York: Aperture, 2016.
5. Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Routledge Classics. New York: Routledge, 1990.
6. Callen, Michael, and Essex Hemphill. Hold Tight Gently: Michael Callen, Essex Hemphill, and the Battlefield of AIDS. New York: The New Press, 2015.
7. Connell, R.W. Some Styles of Masculinity. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012.
8. Crimp, Douglas. AIDS: Cultural Analysis / Cultural Activism. New York: October Books, 1988.
9. Crimp, Douglas. AIDS Demo Graphics. Seattle: Bay Press, 1990.
10. Decter, David. Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz. New York: Bloomsbury, 2019.
11. Farmer, Paul. To End a Plague: America's Fight to Defeat AIDS in Africa. New York: PublicAffairs, 2019.
12. Gould, Deborah B. Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
13. Gould, Deborah B. Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight against AIDS. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
14. Halperin, David M., and Trevor Hoppe, eds. Between Certain Death and a Possible Future: Queer Writing on Growing Up with the AIDS Crisis. New York: The New Press, 2010.
15. Hedrick, Joan D. Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
16. Hoffman, Elizabeth. Women, AIDS, and Activism. New York: The Feminist Press, 1993.
17. James, John S. AIDS Treatment News. San Francisco: The AIDS Treatment News, 1995.
18. Juhasz, Alexandra, and Theodore Kerr. We Are Having This Conversation Now: The Times of AIDS Cultural Production. New York: The MIT Press, 2022.
19. Kinsman, Gary. Inventing AIDS. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009.
20. Kraus, Chris. Felix Gonzalez-Torres. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2017.
21. Lowery, Jack. It Was Vulgar and It Was Beautiful: How AIDS Activists Used Art to Fight a Pandemic. New York: The New Press, 2022.
22. Meyer, Susan, ed. Art AIDS America. New York: University of California Press, 2015.
23. Nussbaum, Bruce. Good Intentions: How Big Business and the Medical Establishment are Corrupting the Fight Against AIDS. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
24. Patton, Cindy. Sex & Germs. Boston: South End Press, 1986.
25. Roth, Benita. The Life and Death of ACT UP/LA. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.
26. Sartre, Jean-Paul. Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr. Translated by Bernard Frechtman, Vintage Books, 1963.
27. Schulman, Sarah. Conflict Is Not Abuse: Overstating Harm and Embracing Responsibility. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2016.
28. Schulman, Sarah. Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1993-1987. New York: The New Press, 2022.
29. Schulman, Sarah. People in Trouble. New York: The Feminist Press, 2019.
30. Staley, Peter. Never Silent: ACT UP and My Life in Activism. New York: HarperOne, 2021. Foreword by Anderson Cooper.
31. Wojnarowicz, David, ed., with James Hoff and Cynthia Carr, contributors. David Wojnarowicz: Dear Jean Pierre. New York: New York University Press, 2023.
32. Wojnarowicz, David. The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous and Other Writings, 2003-1986. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003.

Written & Organized by:  
Ron Goldberg  
Amy Bauer  
Andrew Miller  
Alan Klein

## ZAP/ACTION TEACH-IN OUTLINE

### I. Conceptual

- A. Goal - What you want? (from target?)
- B. Target - Whom/What is action for/against?
- C. Audience - Who are you trying to reach? Who will see it?  
(Target/Publicity/Media/Co-workers/Higher-ups/Community)
- D. Message - What do you want to say? (sentence/visual)
- E. Tactic - How will you achieve goal? Hit target? *street-in fence*  
Reach audience? Get message across?  
(verbs/action: To embarrass, to goad, to educate,  
to draw attention to..., etc.)

### II. Logistics

- A. When (Time & Date) incl. Length of Action  
"optimum people time" vs. "optimum media time" vs.  
"appropriate time"
- B. Where - Location must be scouted
  - 1. Outside
    - a) Physical Layout
      - 1) space available for demo
      - 2) construction/obstructions
      - 3) entrances/exits
      - 4) photo ops
    - b) Visibility
      - 1) pedestrian/auto traffic
      - 2) convenience/accessability
      - 3) nearness to "target"
    - c) Security
      - 1) private property vs. public
      - 2) building security
  - 2. Inside
    - a) Layout
    - b) Public Ingress & Egress
      - 1) open to public?
      - 2) what do you need to get in?  
(passes/ticket/"costume")
    - c) Private vs. Public property
    - d) Security



III. Visual/Theme - Communicating Message/"Why We're Here"

- A. Visual Image(s)
- B. Fact Sheet
- C. Chants

IV. Tactics: (Gene Sharp List)

- A. Type of Action (ex.)
  - 1. Symbolic Protest
  - 2. Disruption/Interference
  - 3. Education/Outreach
  - 4. Civil Disobedience - Purposeful Direct Action  
Risking Arrest by Disobeying Law  
(vs. "Arrest" - action by Police)
    - a) Planned
    - b) Spontaneous
- B. Contingencies - "What ifs..."
  - 1. You can't get preferred spot
  - 2. Group is larger/smaller than planned
  - 3. Act of Higher Power - i.e Weather
  - 4. Police presence/interference
  - 5. Initial demands met prior to demo

C. Ending/Closure - Closing Gesture/Statement

V. What You'll Need

- A. Zap Coordinator(s)/Facilitator(s)
  - 1. Nail down info. (pre-zap)
  - 2. Set up communication/info network at zap  
(marshalls/demonstrators/affinity/support/legal)
  - 3. Help coordinate w/media
  - 4. Interface w/police & legal
- B. Props (\$ avail. from Coord. Comm. via Action or appropriate Committee Rep.)
  - 1. Posters
    - a) New Demo-Specific -- Poster Party
    - b) Old Posters (Both handwritten & S=D)  
(Storage Space) via Action Comm. Rep.
  - 2. Props (sheets, handcuffs, clown masks, chalk...)
  - 3. Bullhorn (Storage Space) - Sound Device Permit?
- C. Fact Sheet - must have Coord. Comm. approval
  - 1. Research/Write - old FS, articles, Issues
  - 2. Layout
  - 3. Typeset (Typeset Anon.)
  - 4. Printer (Village Copy) or Xerox (Xerox Anon)
  - 5. Transportation of FS to and from printers/demo



- D. Marshalls/Peace Keepers (Available via call to Floor)
  - 1. Does not control demo -- facilitates action and minimizes unfriendly interaction between police and protesters.
  - 2. Number needed depends on:
    - a) size & type of demo
    - b) hierarchy of target (position in gov't/corp)
    - c) how far demo pushes legal limits of behavior (type of action)
    - d) CD - spontaneous or planned - Marshalls often fill support/legal gaps
    - e) possibility of moving demo to another location
- E. Support (CD or ARREST)
  - 1. Before Arrest
    - a) Know all affinity members/arrestees (faces)
      - 1) Name
      - 2) Phone
      - 3) Address
      - 4) Date of Birth
      - 5) Emergency #'s - work, medical, personal
      - 6) 24-hour needs (medicine etc.)
  - 2. At Site
    - a) Find out circumstance of arrest
    - b) Where arrestees have been put (vehicle/area)
    - c) Where arrestees have been taken to be processed
      - 1) Ask police/Commanding Officer
      - 2) Ask precinct of arresting officers -- call Precinct House and ask if protesters are being brought there
      - 3) Possibilities: Local Precinct, Manhattan South/North, 1 Police Plaza
    - d) Go to Holding Site - with group if possible but ALWAYS with someone else
    - e) Interface with Legal/Lawyer on details - Who arrested/when/by whom
- F. Legal Observers - ALWAYS
  - 1. Not part of demo - identified as such (armband)
  - 2. Take notes of "happenings" especially interactions with police - provides factual basis for court cases and law suits
  - 3. Does not control demo - observes
- G. Media
  - 1. Amplifies & spotlights issues
  - 2. Works as deterrent for police violence
  - 3. Appropriateness for event (focus/goal)
  - 4. "Our" media vs. "General Public" media

## VI. Personal Issues

- A. Rights/Legal (Check with Legal Contact)
  - 1. Right to moving picket on public sidewalk allowing pedestrian traffic
  - 2. Right to hand out material in public area, allowing pedestrian traffic
  - 3. Church/hospital "Quiet zones"
  - 4. Rights on "private property"
  - 5. Rights in custody
- B. Points of Contention
  - 1. Responsibility of individual to group/group to individual
    - a) Endangerment by group or individual
    - b) Stepping away
    - c) Taking care of one another
  - 2. Consensus & communication
    - a) Keeping everyone informed
    - b) Consensus when "decisions" are being made i.e. changing tactics, ending or moving demo
  - 3. Ending: When to leave  
Warning signs (i.e. demo fatigue, increase of police harrassment, goal achieved -- point of diminished returns)

## VII. ACT UP Procedures

- A. Zaps presented to floor for "participants/planners" & ACT UP approval
- B. Fact Sheets OK'd by Coord (Tues. mtg) or by at least 3 members of Coord
- C. Posters available at Storage Space available thru Actions
- D. Xerox/Typesetters/Car Owners Anonymous - Lists available thru Actions
- E. Marshalls/Legal Observ - Call to Floor
- F. Reimbursement for \$ spent on ACT UP approved Zap (save receipts and give to Action/approp. Coord Rep)
- G. Zap Media Contact Sheet - available thru Media