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James Nevin

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1

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Table of Contents

List of Plates
Introduction
Chapter One:
The Origins of AIDS, the Origins of Manipulation. AIDS and the 'gay label' - Reporting versus occurrence - Gay abandon - Gay men and Disease - Blaming Africa.
Chapter Two:
Demonising Disease: the 'AIDS Cudgel'.
Disease as stigma - From leprosy to language - The 'sick
role' and beyond - The 'risk group' fallacy - The 'plague
metaphor' - The sodomites lot - The 'green monkey

Chapter Two:

Disease as stig role' and beyon metaphor' - T theory' - The 'great chain of being' - The lure of the debased - From transexuals to skulls.

Chapter Three:

Turning the Tables: 'HIV' Positivity' and its manipulation. 39 AIDS: the 'cause celeb'! - Token posturing - Exploiting the hip - The 'merits' of sickness - Rock versus Mercury -AIDS activism and the 'gay garb' - Action = life; HIV positivity - The old and the new: differing presentations of AIDS - The 'red ribbon epidemic' - Youth culture: 'a tide in the veins of youth' - 'Lets talk about sex, lets talk about fashion' - Lampooning the Establishment

Conclusion

Bibliography

65

68

Page

3

4

6

17



List of Plates

1

ш

.

Figure		Page
2.1:	Skulls culled from Sunday World article	36
2.2:	Head of syphilitic prostitute	36
3.1:	'Silence = Death' sticker and poster	49
3.2:	Jimmy Somerville wearing the 'Action = Life' shirt	49
3.3:	Keith Harring AIDS poster	52
3.4:	AIDS! The Musical! promotional poster	52
3.5:	Benetton/Act Up 'pink condom' collaboration	58
3.6:	Cover of Benettons Colors dealing with AIDS	58
3.7:	The Act Up Know Your Scumbag poster	60
3.8:	Depiction of Ronald Reagan with AIDS from Colors	60
3.9:	The Act Up Sexism Rears Its Unprotected Head poster	63
3.10	Example of page in <i>Colors</i> detailing how HIV is spread	63
3.11	: MTV logo with red ribbon 'pinned on'	64

3



The Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) belong as much to myth as to medicine. Both acronyms carry with them a plethora of potent connotations and associations - they are as much social constructs as they are medical disorders. As Jonathan Mann, who headed the World Health Organisations global programme on AIDS, states the AIDS phenomenon can be separated into three distinct epidemics. The first is the epidemic of silent infection by HIV, the second is the epidemic of the disease of AIDS itself and the third epidemic are the social, cultural, economic and political reactions to AIDS. Mann deems the third epidemic to be "as central to the AIDS challenge as the disease itself" (Sabatier, 1988: 4). It is this 'third epidemic', the public spectacle of AIDS divorced from the biological malfunctions that are a consequence of HIV infection, on which this thesis concentrates - how and why is AIDS manipulated? By whom and for whose benefit? Does the exploitation of disease have a precedent? What is the effect?

I shall firstly examine the alluded origins of HIV and explore its early epidemiology. In doing so, I shall seek to investigate the contributing factors which mould the the misconceptions and myths of the epidemic; because it was first noted among urban American gay men, it is intrinsically linked with homosexuality; because the earliest traceable cases have a tenuous African link, the notion that the virus originated in the 'dark continent' still holds currency. Of course HIV doesn't distinguish between race or sexual orientation - AIDS doesn't discriminate.

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The AIDS phenomenon within the broader context of societies inherent demonising of disease is discussed in chapter two. For biological, sociological and psychological reasons disease and sickness are stigmatised and stigmatising. This stigma is intrinsically linked with the perception of a malady rather than its' realities. Since AIDS and HIV are the perceived scourge of pariahs, they inherit the bigoted prejudice heaped upon the ostracised and the deviant. It is the manipulation and the exploitation of this warped perception of disease and the diseased which is scrutinised and questioned. Labels such as the 'gay plague' and 'risk groups' are exposed to be the misnomers that they are.

The final chapter contrasts with the maudlin presentation of disease witnessed in chapter two with an examination of the less despondent and more positive vision of AIDS in the nineties, a direct consequence of the advent of the predominantly gay 'AIDS activist' movement. However, I shall illustrate that this construction of AIDS and HIV equally lends itself to be manipulated and used by various selfseeking concerns, the most prominent perpetrator being Benetton.

I have purposefully endeavoured, wherever possible, to speak of Irish occurrences and give Irish examples. In doing so, I have sought to mimic the literary ploy of utilising the parochial to exemplify the universal. As much as an examination as an investigation, this thesis serves to identify the cosy detachment with which we view this most serious of health and social issues.

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Chapter One

The Origins of AIDS, the Origins of Manipulation.

AIDS and the 'gay label'

The first incidence of what was later to be labelled AIDS was in the American Centres for Disease Controls (CDC) weekly newsletter, the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (MMWR) on Friday, June 5, 1981. The CDC is a United States Government health agency and is comprised of different centres that handle various public health problems. The MMWR is issued on a weekly basis to hospitals and health agencies internationally. Although it does not possess the scientific prestige of notable medical publications such as the British *Lancet*, it is a unique source of relevant, up to the minute developments within the sphere of public health, specifically infectious diseases.

The article in the MMWR reported on five cases of pneumocystis carnii pneumonia (PCP) in previously healthy gay men in Los Angeles (McCombie, 1990: 11). The appearance of PCP, an opportunistic parasite that normally causes disease in individuals with depressed immune systems, in these men without some underlying cause of immune suppression was startling - the fact that two of these men had succumbed to the malady which is usually easily treated was sensational. However, the report appeared not on page one of the MMWR but in a more inconspicuous slot on page two. The title, rather banally, read *Pneumocystis pneumonia - Los Angeles*, devoid of any reference to homosexuality, even though the author of the article, Dr. Wayne Shandera, had originally titled his report *Pneumocystis pneumonia in Homosexual men - Los Angeles*. The gay aspect of the story was down § Constant we use the contribute for any preprior behave, so all for all for the form of the first first of the contribute term to be blacked as a set of the form with the contribute of the contribution of the first set of the contribute darge is as an integral and the contribution of the first set of the contribution of the contribution of the theory of the first set of the first set of the contribution of the contribution of the first set of the contribution of the contribution of the first set of the contribution of the contribution of the first set of the contribution of the theory of the first set of the first set of the contribution of the contribution of the first set of the contribution of the contribution of the first set of the contribution.

played so as to allow it be published at all as the new right wing Reagan administration had recently moved in to the White House and viewed the gay community with nothing less than thinly concealed contempt. However the men's homosexuality was the only characteristic shared by the group of stricken men.

Unexplained maladies from mysterious immune depression were noted to have occurred among the gay community as early as 1979, when Alvin Friedman-Kien of New York University Medical Centre identified a group of patients suffering from a rare form of skin cancer, Kaposi's Sarcoma (KS) (Gilman, 1989: 89). KS was a relatively rare malignancy in the United States at that time, largely confined to elderly men of mediterranean descent and seldom fatal. It was also known to be associated with immune suppression.

In Europe and Africa sporadic cases of baffling immune suppression realised in either PCP or KS were being recorded at the same time. These handful of cases possessed no discernable attribute which might link them unlike the American men who possessed that one characteristic which united them all - the fact they were all gay. It was this fact which prompted the realisation that the incidence of unexplained immune deficiency realised by bizarre maladies were not isolated and unconnected but in someway signified a broader development. Because of the varying nature of opportunistic infections which indicated a weakness in the immune system, this correlation was not immediately obvious. On the east coast of America, KS was the more predominant manifestation of this immune suppression whereas PCP was the more usual signifier on the west coast. Few aligned both diseases until the patients common sexual orientation hinted a correlation. It was the gayness of the men which revealed they had what was later to be understood to be AIDS.

The MMWR report discussing cases of PCP in Los Angeles

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provoked many physicians to consider a link and within a month, a second report in MMWR described the occurrence of KS in 20 gay men from New York and six from California. The article stated that

the occurrence of this number of KS cases during a 30 month period among young, homosexual men is considered highly unusual . . . No previous association between KS and sexual preference has been reported It is not clear if or how the clustering of KS, pneumocystis and other serious disease in homosexual men is related.

(Shilts, 1987: 77)

Whilst the language is cautious and non-committal the alignment of sexual preference with disease is blatant. The boundaries of the new disease were constructed by these initial reports because the mens homosexuality was the only signifier of any correlation in any of these outbreaks of bizarre ailments, although the MMWR were also astutely aware of the inherent stigma of homosexuality in attempting to down play its significance. It is somewhat ironic that the gay aspect which was initially quelled for fear of political reprisal, was to become the defining characteristic in the public perception of the epidemic.

The fact that the thirty one reported cases of mysterious immune deficiency in mid 1981 were among gay men only signified the existence of some inept immune suppression. It did not necessarily indicate the new disease was a specifically gay ailment. But it is the fact that these inept maladies first became noted due to their appearance amongst urban homosexual men living in the gay epicentres of New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco that formed the initial picture of the presumed mechanisms of this curious illness. The centrality of the sexual orientation in the early picture of AIDS can be further seen in the designation of the disease during the first quarter of 1982 as the Gay Related Immune Deficiency (GRID). As Sander L. Gilman states, East Extend and setemetration from service on the line and line and line interval to a set of the set of the set of the line of the set of the factor of the set of the set of the set of the set of the factor of the set of the se

This label structured the understanding of AIDS in such a marked manner that (people with AIDS) were not only stigmatised as carriers of an infectious disease, but also placed in a very specific category.

(Gilman, 1988: 89)

So, even from its earliest emergence within the public sphere, sexual orientation indicated the defining characteristics of AIDS and HIV. Because the individual manifestations of this unexplained immune deficiency were so varied and diverse, the sexual preference was the only initial signifier to a correlation.

Reporting versus occurrence

Since all thirty one of the first reported cases in America were among gay men, does that not suggest that this indeed was a disease striking the male homosexual community exclusively? It is here that the important distinction must be made between reporting and actual occurrence. For instance, at the same time, the virus was being transmitted at an equally alarming rate among intravenous drug users due to the common practice of sharing hypodermic needles. PCP had been seen intermittently among IV drug users as early as 1979 in New York and had been called 'junkie pneumonia'. However, at that time the poor and disadvantaged of poverty ravaged inner cities tended to inject illicit drugs as opposed to the more middle class penchant to sniff or snort. Because of the nature of the U.S. health care system, where government subsidy is minimal and the burden of cost is imposed on the patient, the poor are virtually excluded. Hence, the incidence of AIDS among IV drug users went undetected. The stricken gay men tended to be middle class. Thus, the incidence of unexplained immune suppression first became noted in these gay men because they had access to health care, whereas the majority of IV drug users simply didn't. A number of sporadic cases of unexplained immune depression implied by the occurrence of baffling illnesses were recorded in Europe as early as 1977. However, there was little to suggest that these were incidents were in anyway related, unlike

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the common sexuality of the group of American men. Mysteriously ill people aren't all that rare in the medical practice in any case. It is only with the benefit of hindsight that we can align these deaths in the late seventies with the human immunodeficiency virus.

That AIDS existed on the African continent at this time can be seen in the case of young woman from Zaire who travelled to Belgium in early 1977 with her three year old daughter who was suffering from oral candidiasis, a yeast infection of the mouth and again signifier of immune suppression. One of the woman's children had already died of a respiratory ailment stemming from strange problems with her immune system and by the beginning of 1978 both mother and daughter who had travelled to Europe succumbed to series of severe infections associated with immune deficiency (Shilts, 1987: 36).

As to why the incidence of HIV at this time went undetected and unreported, the answer is multifaceted. Firstly, immune suppression is not a particularly remarkable phenomenon in under developed regions of Africa. Poor sanitary coupled with malnutrition contribute to a weakening of the immune system leaving one susceptible to a barrage of infections. Therefore among African communities the incidence of disease caused by a weakening of the bodies immunity is not all that infrequent. Cases of what we now recognise as AIDS could then have gone undetected for quite a period. Added to this, health care facilities in many regions of Africa are hopelessly inadequate and do not possess the capability of identifying the emergence of new viral agents in the manner of the more efficient American CDC (it is noteworthy that the case I've discussed of the family from Zaire was noted in Europe and not in Africa). Also the very nature of HIV infection renders it particularly difficult to identify. It manifests itself in a variety of diverse opportunistic infections. Rather than being a single illness, AIDS is a medical condition whose consequences are a spectrum of illnesses. Because the presenting illnesses

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n de la companya de En la companya de la c were so varied and seemingly unrelated, it took as I've pointed out, the association of the patients common sexuality to suggest a link. It is known that the virus remains latent for a period prior to actually causing disease. Therefore HIV is what is termed a retrovirus, that is to say having entered an organisms 'host' cells (i.e. the infected person), the virus and the host reach a state of equilibrium in which both coexist for years. The time from exposure to the virus to the onset of actual disease is not immediate. This is in contrast with the Ebola river virus outbreak in 1976 when this curious epidemic which erupted in 55 villages along the river Ebola in Zaire, caused its victims to suffer extreme fevers and bleed profusely until finally dying within a week of acquiring the virus. The World Health Organisation aided by the American CDC managed to confine the Ebola epidemic which subsequently disappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as it had arisen.

How did this new viral agent become the blight of the gay meccas of New York and San Francisco at the beginning of this century penultimate decade ? It was remarked at the time of the Ebola virus epidemic that had the outbreak not been confined and managed to 'seep out' as it were to the broader world, it would have been quite nightmarish.

With modern roads and jet travel, no corner of the earth was very remote anymore ; never again could disease linger undetected for centuries among a distant people with out finding some route to fan out across the planet

(Shilts, 1987: 5)

Wherever the viruses origins, it is clear it travelled quite easily to become epidemic in three continents simultaneously.

Gay abandon

However, the quick pace of HIV spread among gay men is more complex. In the seventies, promiscuity was central to the raucous gay

movement in America which was fervently flirting with its new found liberation following the stonewall riots in 1969, when for the first time ever Greenwich village drag queens fought back and attacked police engaged in the routine harassment of a gay bar called the Stonewall Inn. Gay liberation asserted a new found gay confidence, and strove for gay civil rights and gay freedom. Gay and bisexual men and women emerged out of a profound state of political and personal oppression. However, according to gay novelist Armistead Maupin, "Sex is the reason this liberation movement came about" (Browning, 1994: 80) and, as Susan Sontag states

in the 1970's . . . many male homosexuals reconstituted themselves as something like an ethnic group, one whole distinctive folkloric custom was sexual voracity, and its institutions of urban homosexual life became a sexual delivery system of unprecedented speed, efficiency, and volume

(Sontag, 1989: 76)

Recreational and commercialised sex was indeed a central tenet of gay thinking in America during that decade, and the hundreds of bathhouses dotted across the United States certainly offered their patrons sexual exploits 'of unprecedented speed and volume'. Sex became a commodity orgasms were churned out the way Henry Ford produced model T's. Indeed, it has been asserted that the average customer at these sex emporiums typically had 2.7 sexual contacts a night. (Shilts 1987: 19) Sexual permissiveness was rife during this era, which has been labelled 'the golden age of sex' by some wistful commentators, and while monogamy was not exactly scorned, it was not viewed particularly favourably. As to why gay men were so fervently sexually active at this time, it has been proposed that centuries of repression and denial had been stifling and gay men now grasped their new found liberation with unprecedented vigour, zest and ardour. Like the adolescent who happens across masturbation and becomes entranced by their newly discovered muses of presence the say someway to whole is a case say reason freedom. In emittance the say society of the states of a case of the restant total. The evenence business are sented which is the case to restant total. The evenence business are sented which is the another restant total. The evenence business are sented with the total restant to the fit of the case of the case of the event of the restant total are to be a sented of the case of the c

means of pleasure, the gay community revelled in their new sexual freedom. To continue the analogy, just as the the teenagers initial frequent forays in self-stimulation peter out to more occasional masturbation, it was believed the rampant sexual activity of America's gay community would similarly balance out as it were and become less intense and copious with time had HIV not entered the scenario.

Of course, the gay community can not be deemed in any way culpable for the initiating of the epidemic - how were they to know? As Rob Baker points out, when speaking of the scene in the television docudrama based on Randy Shilts' book, And the Band Played On, in which a character looks upon a halloween parade in San Francisco and declares "the parties over";

Halloween didn't bring us AIDS. It may have appeared at the party, like in Edgar Allen Poe's 'Masque of the Red Death', but the party didn't create it and the partiers are certainly not to blame.

(Baker, 1994: 60)

Halloween in this context is taken to epitomise the 'gay abandon' during the seventies. It is a holiday which is particularly queer - the notions of dressing up and concealing identity appeal to the gay sensibility. The 'party' that was gay life almost two decades ago didn't invite AIDS and death - it gate crashed!

Gay men and disease

It had been noted throughout the seventies that a consequence of rampant promiscuity of American gay men was the widespread transmission of numerous sexually transmitted diseases and infections among the male homosexual community. Bathhouse patrons risked a thirty three percent chance of contracting either syphilis or gonorrhea, while the incidence of gastroin-testinal parasites, popularly called 'gay bowl evaluation is the end of the grands entropy of the second to second the test constraint single is \$27.1 is read to if the grands's an paper of the end of the entropy of that is accordant of the grands's and if the second second second second attended is accordance on the birds of the end of the second second second entropy is a second second second second second second second second entropy is a second second second second second second second second entropy is a second second second second second second second second second entropy is a second second second second second second second second second entropy is a second second second second second second second second second entropy and the second second second second second second second second second entropy and the second second second second second second second second second entropy and the second second second second second second second second second entropy and the second second second second second second second second second entropy and the second second second second second second second second second to be a second the second seco

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syndrome' at the end of the decade increased by eight thousand percent since 1973, a result of the growth in popularity of the act of 'rimming'that is oral-anal activity. (Feldman, 1990: 47). Easy treatment of these ailments had imbued the gay community with a cavalier attitude towards venereal diseases. The sheer volume of sexual activity meant the variety of infections were transmitted with much ease. As infectious disease specialist in San Francisco, Dr. Selma Dritz astutely pointed out in late 1980,

Too much is being transmitted here. We've got all these diseases going unchecked. There are so many opportunities for transmission that if something new gets loose here, we're going to have hell to pay

(Shilts, 1987: 40)

But even as Dr. Dritz spoke, 'something new' was already being transmitted. Doctors had intermittently noted over the previous two years strange inflammation of the lymph nodes in gay men which is symptomatic of immune complications, and today recognised to be a feature of AIDS related complex (ARC) or pre-AIDS, a precursor to more severe immune deficiency. Wherever its origins, when HIV entered the male gay community, probably sometime in the early or mid seventies it spread with great ferocity because of the widespread sexual permissiveness.

Blaming Africa

It has been widely purported that the human immunodeficiency virus originated in Africa, and while the case of the Zairian woman and her children in 1977 suggests a very strong African link, the distinction must be again made between actual incidence and reporting. It must be remembered that the epidemic seems to have started at approximately the same time in Africa as in America and Europe. While the equatorial climate of sub-Saharan Africa is particularly conducive to the efficient breeding of new and puzzling viral agents such as the Ebola virus, there is

Adda service da de la construcción en construction de la construcción de absolutely no conclusive evidence to suggest HIV is a similar phenomenon. And while the earliest tracing of blood samples registering HIV positive were originally drawn in Kinashasa, Zaire in 1959, it must be noted that during the same year *The Lancet* documented the death in Manchester of a British sailor with kaposi's sarcoma and pnuemonocystis (Sabatier, 1988: 35). As Simon Watney states, "by the late 1980's many researchers agreed that the evidence for AIDS originating in Africa is weak" (Watney, 1994: 124). It is interesting to note that in Africa the disease is perceived to have originated in the United States.

As to why HIV infection spread among heterosexual men and women in central and east Africa and has become such a catastrophic epidemic today is a little more problematic. It has been proposed that rates of infection are so high among sub-Saharan heterosexuals because sexually transmitted diseases are generally untreated in that region, and "open penile (and vaginal) lesions would promote HIV infectivity" (Feldman, 1990: 50). It seems to be a credible possibility and is far more plausible than notions of Africans as being inherently promiscuous creatures which is essentially racist nonsense. Anthony Pinching in his essay *AIDS and Africa: Lessons for Us All* speaks of the western fantasy of a perverted and diseased black population as the 'originators' of AIDS;

Rumours have circulated about the use of anal intercourse as a common means of birth control in Africa; this idea represents a carry-over from the initial perceptions of AIDS as something intrinsically to do with homosexual behaviour. The widespread acceptance of these alternative explanations seems to indicate a remarkable ignorance about the countries in question; more disturbingly they have shown that many observers are willing to accept the obvious, if unpleasant, conclusions that AIDS, or rather HIV, is heterosexually transmitted.

(Gilman, 1988: 103)

Also indicative of the first world ignorance is the fact that because of the western insistence on the need to inoculate imposed on the developing

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world coupled with the prohibitive cost of needles and syringes in the third world due to the opportunism of companies from developed countries, HIV is very effectively transmitted through African communities by blood being passed from patient to patient as hypodermic needles are used and re-used in a deadly cycle.

The early epidemiology of AIDS and HIV is difficult to trace and the origins of the virus are impossible to garner. However, because its existence was first noted among the urban gay community of America's cities, it has inherited the label - sometimes underlying, sometimes blatant - of being a gay affliction. Equally, because of the tenuous evidence supporting the hypothesis that the virus originated in Africa, that continent has endured the brunt of the misplaced blame.

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Chapter Two

Demonising Disease: the 'AIDS cudgel'

Disease as stigma

The association of sickness and disease with stigma is not just a unique phenomenon of the AIDS and HIV epidemic but is rather a more ongoing social construction. The word 'stigma' derives from the greek word 'stizein', meaning to prick, brand or tattoo. From this original meaning, stigma has come to be used of any mark, actual or figurative, distinguishing a person, often unfavourably. Therefore, to stigmatised is to brand, denounce or designate as something discreditable and undesirable. The demonising of disease in such a manner and the vision of illness as a deficiency has been a long held popular tenet. The nature of illness, the rendering of one as inadequate, weak and susceptible, lends it to become a stigma. But it is the connotations and implications of that stigma which are so as virulent and harmful (if not more so) than the actual malady. People have been stigmatised as much by the 'idea' of a given ailment as by its reality.

Christopher C. Taylor makes the distinction between AIDS the 'disease', that is the biological malfunctions occasioned by sickness, and AIDS the 'illness', the manner by which the sickness is experienced by the sufferer (Taylor, 1990: 56). It is the perception of the illness rather than the realities of the disease which forms the general understanding of AIDS and HIV.

Many . . . fear and detest AIDS more for its perceived association with a 'debauched' lifestyle, most notably, homosexuality and intravenous drug use, than for any direct health threat to themselves

(Taylor, 1990: 56)

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The unique stigma of AIDS relies on notions of AIDS the 'illness' rather than AIDS the 'disease' coupled with the added stigmas of those it is perceived to affect. Tayors' distinction is much the same as what Jonathan Mann terms the 'third epidemic'.

From leprosy to language

Prior to the advent of AIDS and HIV, various illnesses in succession carried with them palpable stigmas. These were in essence value judgements about the disease which were in vogue at particular social and historical junctures. But what renders them alike is the fact that they all demonise disease and in turn taint and tarnish the sufferer. That most infamous of biblical scourges, leprosy, belongs to this mode. The 'leprosy' of the old and new testaments is not the leprosy of modern medicine - now commonly called Hansen's disease - but rather a general banner for a multitude of eruptive skin infections. Still, that these ailments went under a single label which possessed a potent stigma makes it relevant. Leprosy was stigmatised to such an extent that the word 'leper' is today synonymous with pariahs, societies ostracised. Indeed Christopher C. Taylor recounts the medieval practice of subjecting lepers, upon the first symptoms of affliction to a funeral mass to mark their death - the victim even lay in a coffin for its duration (Taylor, 1990: 57). Once the mass was celebrated, the diseased person was hastily removed to a leper colony. Thus, one might say that they experienced a very real social death prior to any actual biological one. It is marginalization of the diseased in a tangible way. That leprosy is not the virulent killer it is mythically perceived to be and is deceptively difficult to actually catch underlines the power of stigma. Tuberculosis and syphilis are also diseases laden with the burden of stigma and I shall return to the specific relevance of both maladies later

That sickness is intrinsically linked with stigma is evident in the employment of words relating to sickness in everyday language. They are und digment exclusion (di a pelatitic) (diamenting), and an each of even last solutions and backet and boolet adde is accur down in the control of a control of a control of a control discontrol of a control and in the solution of the down in the control of a local and an area and solutions are industry that the discontrol of the down in the control of a local and an area and a significant and a structure and the discontrol of the down in the control of a local and area and a significant and a structure and the discontrol of the down in the control of a local and area and a significant and a structure of the control of the control of the control of a local and the second of the control of the structure and a second of the control of the control of the control of the control of the area and a second of the control of the area and a second of the control of the control of the control of the second of the control of the area and a second of the control of the area and a second of the control of the area of the second of the control of the area of the second of the control of the area of the second of the control of the area of the second of the control of the area of the control of the area of the control of the control

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used almost exclusively in a pejorative, disparaging and negative context; societies problems are often called social 'maladies'; something which is disconcerting or repulsive is deemed to be 'sick'; bad trade deficits are said to be 'crippling' and signify an 'ailing' economy, and so on. The stigma of disease is so prevelant that health and sickness are metaphors for good and evil. Indeed, 'ill' when used as a prefix to form a compound, signify negativity, malice and even evil -.illadvised, illtreated, illmannered and so on. Within the realm of linguistics, disease and illness carry with them malevolent connotations and a discernable negative stigma.

The 'sick role' and beyond

From a sociological point of view, Talcott Parsons speaks of the the sick role - that is the social constructions which deal with the person who is incapable of expected role performance and is thus deemed sick (as opposed to the person capable of proper and constructive role performance but refuses to do so, that is the criminal) (Quam, 1990: 30). Both 'abnormal' roles are considered deviancies from expected role performances which serve to prop up social integration and stability. To counteract the negative effect both deviancies have on social structure we have the legal system in the case of criminality and the medical system for the sick. The sick role in particular is imbued with negativity so as to discourage mimicking of such dysfunctional behaviour. For example the real experience of discomfort, pain and suffering is often heightened and promoted so as to dissuade the notion that being labelled 'sick' enables one avoid work. Thus, the script for the sick role includes (among other conditions) the notion that the sick person will view his or her illness as undesirable. Therefore, the notion of sickness as a deficiency, an inadequacy and a deviance is not just a psychological invention but is also a sociological construction for which there is a definite purpose - to control the spread of dysfunctional behaviour.

However E. Freidson makes a point in the relation to the sick role

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when involving sexually transmitted diseases which in popular perception AIDS is believed to be (Quam, 1990: 33). Within the structures of Parsons theory, when an ill person is held blameless for their deviation from social roles and norms, then a sort of legitimacy is ascribed and the sick role is entered into unconditionally. In contrast if the illness is perceived to be the result of some of serious deviation for which culpability can be issued, then the sick role may be denied and instead the ill person may be treated as a criminal (the other 'abnormal' role). Since STD's are perceived to be the result of promiscuity and sexual deviancy, which are generally frowned upon by society, they fall into the latter category of Friedson's hypothesis.

The conviction persists that AIDS is a disease of the deviant, because in America where the syndrome was first noted, the virus initially appeared to single out groups and acts regarded as perverse and contaminating (the biological and sociological reasons for which I have discussed in chapter one). According to Micheal D. Quam in *The Sick Role, Stigma and pollution: the case of AIDS*,

In the case of AIDS, the orifices of the body where the virus enters at least when it is sexually transmitted, are symbolically considered 'dirty': the anus because of feces, the vagina where menstrual blood flows, and the penis because of urination, ejaculation and penetration of the 'dirty' vagina or anus

(Quam, 1990: 38)

That semen and blood, previously the bearers and maintainers of life should now become the carriers of pollution and death increases the stigma of AIDS

Whilst many illnesses burden their victims with an inherent stigma aligned with disease and its negative connotations - inadequacy, pollution, perversity culpability and death - AIDS and HIV also inherit ana na georean parimpena presentation ha para elempata elempata el se seconda da la matema i luma ao comente provincia a messa entre entre tertar tertar tertar mana mejora tertar a seria entre entre entre el esterono neceto entre el entre el entre contra ante mejora tertar el entre el entre el entre entre entre el

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the bigoted prejudice associated with the pariahs it is perceived to afflict. That is to say, while many illnesses turn their victims into a sort of stigmatised class, AIDS takes stigmatised classes and turns them into victims.

The 'risk group' fallacy

One can say then, that the stigma associated with the concept of disease is made all the more virulent when coupled with the stigmas related to the mechanisms (real or perceived) of a given disease. Certain cancers and ulcers are popularly believed to be the consequences of the repression of virile emotions especially anger and sexual feelings. Both afflications are the perceived scourge of the demure and thus there is an underlying hint of culpability, almost of self-infliction. This culpability is all the more blatant when the association is made in the case of cancers with alcoholism and cancer of the esophagus or smoking and lung cancer. Indeed, the recent controversies over the medical professions proposed refusal to offer certain health care treatments to people who smoke illustrates this point. The concept is that if one is deemed blameworthy of wilfully putting oneself at risk of disease then one must endure the consequences. Its a kind of 'your just deserts' philosophy or (to borrow another flippant cliche) a 'you've made your bed, so lie in it ' ideology. If stigma is taken to be the trait by which an individual is marked as discredited, then as Micheal D. Quam asserts "when personal responsibility for the stigma can be imputed to the individual, the severity of stigmatisation increases" (Quam, 1990: 35)

This thinking can be applied to HIV and the much maligned 'risk groups', that is gay men and IV drug users. The very notion of risk groups insinuates culpability. That male homosexuality, which is a 'state of being' more so than a practice, is condemned as a risk is relevant. The reduction and denigration of a gay person (and I emphasise person) to a series of sexual acts is demeaning, belittling and simply ridiculous. It is Applie and Apple to Mean and Apple and Apple that a barrie to basis over a solution before a terms of the factor of an and send on the carts of barries because beach is a solution over the solution provide the second of the terms of the terms of the terms of the terms of a short and a second of the terms of the terms of the terms of the terms of a short and a second of the terms of a short and a second of the terms of a short and a second of the terms of terms of

الحالي المراجع المتالية المحرمة من المراجع الم المراجع more correct to warn of risk activities since it isn't ones sexual orientation that puts one at risk but certain sexual practices - which aren't exclusively practiced by gay men in any case. In contrast with smoking and drinking in the case of cancer, as Susan Sontag points out,

the unsafe behaviour that produces AIDS is judged to be more of a weakness. It is an indulgence, delinquency - addictions to chemicals that are illegal and to sex regarded as deviant

(Sontag, 1989: 67)

Therefore the assumption of means of transmission in the first world, that is that is unprotected anal intercourse and the sharing of intravenous syringes, lends AIDS the added stigmas of homosexuality and drug dependency. Whilst this may serve to categorise and limit the disease within the mind at least - which in turn serves to quell anxiety, it also heaps the potent prejudice and bigotry directed at both groups onto the the very real stigma of disease. That one can be deemed blameworthy of contracting the disease increases the stigma.

That this notion of risk groups as opposed to risk activities is still in currency can be seen by the *Notice to Donors* issued by the Blood Transfusion Service Board. It begins by conceding that "AIDS is a serious disease". It details the means of transmission and refers to the "AIDS virus" antibody test (interesting it calls HIV the "AIDS virus". In doing so it associates the terminal stage of disease with actual infection) yet completes the statement with the ominous statement (printed in bold) "testing alone cannot totally guarantee safety". It then proceeds to insist that persons belonging to the following "high risk groups must not donate blood or plasma", the words "must not donate" underlined with a thick red line. The first stated high risk group includes "any man who has had sex, even once, with another man since 1978". While IV drug users and haemophiliacs and their sexual partners are listed, as are visitors to central Africa who have indulged in sexual activity there, the priority

given to gay men is noteworthy. It is interesting that no distinction is made between sexual preference and sexual practice. It is emphatically stated that one must not donate blood if one has partaken in gay sex at any stage over a seventeen year period without detailing what that sex entails. It is presumed that it is in fact anal sex, which again is a reduction of gay sex to one very specific activity. Even if one hasn't indulged in ass-fucking or used a condom when one did, one still isn't permitted to do the civilly minded thing and give blood, the only discernable reason being because you are gay or bisexual. Had the precondition stated 'any man who has unprotected anal or oral sex with another man since 1978' the distinction would have been made between risk group and risk activity. But the statement as stands unequivocally labels male homosexuals as a risk group and therefore a diseased entity. It is a kind of remedicalisation of gayness which had seemingly ceased prior to the AIDS epidemic when the WHO abolished its classification of homosexuality as "a psychological disorder" in the seventies. The government and medical profession (to which the transfusion board is aligned) are establishment institutions. That the association of gay sex with infection and disease is issued by an authorative agency, under the auspices the department of health would seem to give a credibility not imbued upon wild proclamations from say the tabloid press. The labelling of gay men and intravenous drug user as high risk groups in this manner and in this context has the effect of medically confirming the perceived danger both groups pose for the 'general population'.

By deeming specific elements of society as risk groups one serves to ostracise already excluded segments of the population, forming a community of pariahs. Linking AIDS and HIV to marginalised groups has a dual effect. Firstly, it imposes the stigma of disease and infection, contamination and pollution on gay men and IV drug user. Secondly, AIDS and HIV are imbued with the potent prejudice and virulent hostility endured by these 'deviant' pariahs. Thus, whilst the diseased information and set and sharpers and settlementally the second encoderation and a second encoderation and a set subsequences and the set settlement of a contract or a set (settlement) and a set (settlement) and a settlement for many for a contract or set of a settlement or a settlement or a settlement or a settlement or a settlement o

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inherit the stigma of the disease, simultaneously, the disease inherits the stigma the diseased. It is a bizarre, but potent, hotch-potch of prejudice. It must be remembered that activities not identities spread the virus.

The 'plague' metaphor

That stigmas are social and psychological inventions is seen in the inferring of plaque metaphors upon selected diseases throughout history. That AIDS was persistently labelled the 'gay plague' in the early years of the epidemic illustrates the two facets which compose the stigma of AIDS. Firstly the pollution and contamination of disease is implied by 'plague' and and secondly the deviancy of homosexuality is implied by 'gay'.

Perhaps the most potent stigma of disease is that of disease as plague. Defined as an affliction or a disaster and a scourge or bane, the word plague derives from the latin 'plaga' meaning a blow, stroke or injury. Therefore that which can be deemed a plague is that which hampers, disables and restricts - a function, so the stigma tells us, of which illness is capable. Of course the pages of the bible are littered with a spate of plaques. Biblical plaques give the use of this metaphor in relation to illness an added meaning. Plagues from the old testament are severe pestilences which God inflicts for retribution or as a punishment. The seven plagues Yahweh inflicted on the Egyptians in Exodus are memorably brutal. The word plague carries with it very vivid connotations of divine wrath and deadly virulence.

I should note at this point that not all diseases are viewed metaphorically as plagues. For example the influenza and polio epidemics in the early part of this century were spared this stigma, Susan Sontag tell us, because they

. . . . did not have enough attributes perennially ascribed to plagues, (for instance, polio was construed as typically a disease of children - of the innocent)

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(Sontag, 1989: 56)

Added to this was the fact that these diseases were devoid of any perceived culpability. After the first world war, the outbreak of Spanish flu killed between twenty and forty million people worldwide. Such a frightening, mammoth toll, one would presume, should invoke plague metaphors. However, influenza is an airborne virus and no one is excluded from susceptibility. If a disease is everybodies, how can anybody be blamed? God doesn't punishment the evil and the virtuous.

But maladies for which one can be deemed in someway responsible of inflicting on oneself or others, inherit the label plague easily. Syphilis, a disease closely aligned with AIDS because of their association with sexual transmission, is a case in point. Plagues are invariably regarded as judgements on society. Venereal diseases bring to mind not only the perhaps greatest of taboos, namely sex, but the even more sinister stigma of nonmonogamous or promiscuous sex. The belief is that disease reveals, and is a punishment for moral laxity or turpitude. (Sontag, 1989: 57). Again, it echoes the biblical concept of God's admonition - that the 'wages of sin is death' or at least disease.

The sodomites lot

The notion of homosexuality as, at the very least, an undesirable trait of course precedes the advent of HIV. Broader societies concept of what it is to be gay is a fallacy. Their assumptions are based on the outer garb of the gay community. For example, as Frank Browning points out, there are far more heterosexual cross-dressers than homosexual ones and S&M shopkeepers attest to serving eight to ten times as many straight people as they do gay people, yet the perception is that drag and sadomasochism are specifically associated with homosexual desire (Browning, 1994: 211). In any case, sexual desire is not an absolute. The 'homosexual' is the invention of the Victorian era, when the noun came Ensure contratives much dense proping that is both to such accessing to the star flatment of acts of a condition definition of the condition to the condition to the condition we and broaden acts of a condition was also by condition to the condition of the condition definition to the second condition was also by condition to the condition of the condition definition to the second condition of the condition of the condition of the condition of the second test the second condition of the condition of the condition of the condition of the second condition of the condition of the condition of the condition of the condition from the second condition of the condition of the condition of the condition.

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into common use. Most people don't heed to such classification as the famous *Kinsey Report* of the early part of this century bore out. People regard themselves as primarily sexual, the prefix is largely irrevelent. A significant proportion of the population have at some time indulged in sexual activity with members of their own sex without assuming the label 'homosexual' or even 'bisexual'. According to Browning,

the reframing of sexuality from a broad set of acts anyone might commit to a peculiar set of acts identified with a people of specialised desire is a gift of the twentieth century.

(Browning, 1994: 219)

This relatively recent emergence of a categorising system of sexuality is almost an exclusively western phenomenon. For instance, Brazilian men. who engage in the same-sex interactions simply don't identify themselves as gay or bisexual. Equally, most non-western languages don't have a specific word for 'homosexuality'.

Male homosexuality is synonymous with a particular sexual act, namely anal sex, which we have already witnessed with the Transfusion Boards Notice to Donors. Anal sex is regarded as a perversion and a deviance, so by direct implication so is homosexuality. For instance, Oscar Wilde, Ireland's most famous (or infamous!) homosexual prosecuted his lovers father, the Marquis of Queensbury for libel because of his accusation that Wilde was "posing as a sodomite". Of course Wilde lost, was convicted of the "crime of homosexuality" in subsequent trials and promptly banished to Reading gaol. Again the Bible is perhaps the key source for this negativity. The yarn in Genesis detailing the Lords "raining down of sulphurous fire" upon Sodom and Gomorrah as divine judgement on the corruption and perverse passions of the cities inhabitants is well known. The link between anal sex and vice, sin and retribution can be seen in the popular usage of the word 'sodomy' to describe the activity. It is easy to ascertain where the notion that AIDS is acceleration instrumbure on monophic control to that a

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another divine judgement on 'sodomites' originated.

Indeed, the American 'Moral Majority' leader Jerry Falwell and his ilk purport ad nauseum this nonsense. Falwell is recorded to have proclaimed that "when you violate moral, health and hygiene laws, you reap the whirlwind. You cannot shake your fist in God's face and get by with it" (Shilts, 1987: 347), while his contemporary Patrick Buchanan commented; "The poor homosexuals - they have declared war on nature and now nature is exacting an awful retribution" (Shilts, 1987: 311). But their logic is deeply flawed. Were AIDS God's venegence on the morally corrupt as purported by these right-wing religious fundamentalists, why are male homosexuals and not females punished? Equally, why are drug users who inject intravenously singled out and not those who sniff? There is also the problematic occurrence of 'innocent victims', that is infants who were infected by their mothers and adults who infected through transfusions as opposed to those who are by implication guilty, those who became infected through sexual or drug use activities. If the bible thumpers had actually bothered to read their bibles, they would have noted that Yahweh was prepared to spare the cities were he to find ten innocent people there. Therefore, were the AIDS and HIV epidemic a sort of neo-Sodom and Gomorrah, how does one account for the 'innocents'?

Sexual orientation persists as the defining characteristic of the AIDS epidemic although it belies the realities - 90% of recorded cases in the nineties are a result of heterosexual contact a MTV report tells us. These boundaries were constructed at the initial outbreak as I have already examined. AIDS is an infectious disease and thus by direct implication, homosexuality has become regarded to be not only a perversity but, to borrow Simon Watneys phrase, an 'infectious desire'. (Watney, 1989, 23). That this thinking is current in Ireland today is clearly illustrated in an article published in the Irish Times in May 1991, when the public debate about the decriminalisation of homosexuality was Set is the set of t

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active. Written by Family Solidarity's secretary Dr. Joseph McCarroll, the article is basically a diatribe detailing the organisations oppositions to the legalisation of homosexuality. Under the sub-heading 'Protecting health and morals', Dr. McCarroll recounts a European Convention of Human Rights ruling which allows the state to pass laws interfering with privacy where they are necessary to protect health and morals. He then states that

As the governments own AIDS education teaches, sodomy and such acts pose a significant danger to health. They put those who practice them at high risk of contracting the fatal AIDS disease

(Why Homosexual Acts . . . , Irish Times, 30 May 1991).

Whilst Dr. McCarrolls language is not as flamboyant as Americas religious right the insinuation is the same; gay equals disease. His use of the word 'sodomy' to describe anal intercourse (again, reducing homosexuality to a specific act) is interesting. It instantly invokes images of Sodom and Gomorrah and of divine retribution. The effect is to render the 'sexually undesirable' socially undesirable.

What the notion of risk groups signifies is a tangible fear of AIDS the 'illness' (as opposed to 'the disease'). Cindy Patton calls this phenomenon 'AIDSphobia', that is the coalescing of homophobia, racism and a fear of contagion - a coming together of various stigmas. That this 'AIDSphobia' is a very real experience can be seen by the Sunday Independent report in January 1994 entitled *Minister to tackle stigma of AIDS*. Reporter Kevin Moore points to the unwillingness of sufferers to come forward because of the stigma attached to the disease. The then Minister for Health, Mr Howlin was to call a special conference with the National AIDS Strategy Committee to discuss the problem. ("Minister to tackle stigma of AIDS", Sunday Independent: 23 January 1994) This stigma which deters people with AIDS and HIV from "coming forward", that is acknowledging their illness in either the public or medical arena, In the description (2.14) mathematic, "Addition for a direct struct queries of the production as the field struct a data type of a conduct structure construcheader and at include a some above any one of where data the sector back to a date the data to be the construction of the sector structure to a date the data to be the construction of the sector structure to a date the data to be the construction of the sector structure to be a date to a date to be the construction of the sector structure to a date to a date to be a sector of the sector structure to be the sector structure.

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is in essence 'AIDSphobia'. AIDSphobia is a direct consequence of the promotion of the 'risk group' theory. The notion of risk groups asserts blame and culpability upon those infected with the virus. Who would want to align themselves with the 'gay plague' with all its connotations, associations and insinuations.

As I have already detailed, afflications such as cancer and ulcers carry with them an implication of culpability. But with AIDS this blame is imposed upon groups. This imposition of censure upon distinct elements of society is not historically peculiar to AIDS. In the 1830's, for example, sanitarians blamed the urban poor for the scourge of cholera because of their perceived moral filthiness (Mort, 1987: 211). The labelling of an entire class of society as diseased may seem abhorrent, but this is dwarfed by tarnishing of an entire continent in this manner as is the case of AIDS and Africa.

The 'Green Monkey' Theory

AIDS and HIV are truly epidemic is sub-Sarahan Africa. It is a human tragedy of colossal proportions. With in excess of ten million people already infected, the World Bank estimates that in eastern Africa, for every mother dying of AIDS, three children are orphaned (UN Chronicle, June 1994: 49). But despite the alarming seriousness of the epidemic in Africa, it would be true to say that were AIDS not also a disease affected by the first world, few outside of the 'dark continent' would be concerned with it. It would be thought of as another one of those hideous scourges, like famines which ravage the underdeveloped and overpopulated third world from time to time. Some ten million people today suffer from Hansen's disease - formerly as I've previously mentioned labelled with much associated stigma, leprosy - but its an ailment that's largely ignored by the first world because it is confined to Africa and the Indian subcontinent (Sontag, 1989: 93). Equally, the recent outbreak of pneumonic plague in India only achieved widespread coverage here when

fears arose about migrating Indians bringing the disease with them to Britain. Real interest is expressed in Africa and AIDS when speculation over the geographical origins of HIV are considered. In chapter one, I discussed the possibility that the virus originated in Africa. While the evidence supporting this theory is far from conclusive the popular myth persists about the virus originating from the east African green monkey. A form of immune deficiency is indeed experienced by primates called 'Simian AIDS' (Shilts, 1987: 459). But the viral agent which causes SAIDS, 'simian t-lymphotrophic virus' bears very little similarity to the human immuno-deficiency virus and the theory has been soundly rejected by the Harvard scientists who initially proposed it 1985. Nevertheless, the myth persists as can be seen in a report in the Star newspaper in late 1991 under the headline Monkey blood the cause of AIDS says scientist. The article proposes that "malaria infected monkey blood" which was "injected into about 34 people between the 1920's and 1960's to develop a malaria vaccine" may have been the way "monkey AIDS" spread to man ("Monkey blood . . .", The Star: 29 November 1991). This particular 'monkey theory' is quite mild in that it is more usually purported that the flesh of the primate was eaten or some form of bestiality took place.

What the 'green monkey' theory serves to do is demean Africa in associating that continent with the primitive and the barbaric. Its an association that has been imposed on the peoples of Africa for centuries. The most common image of Africa witnessed by the west today is the emaciate, starving hordes on our television screens. The much maligned 'dark continent' is perceived to be the domain of "rot, filth, decay, disease, and the naked 'animal blackness'" (Watney, 1994: 118). The scourge of famine and disease is believed to be omnipresent as if Africa were the worlds naturally designated zone for such catastrophic events, despite the fact that these occurrences are as much a result of the first worlds post-colonial indifference as of any natural or geographic factors. Therefore it is easy to see how Africa inherited the burden of blame as

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regards the origins of the human immuno-deficiency virus. As Cindy Patton explains,

the unconscious belief that a strange new virus could not have arisen from the germ free west led researchers on a fantastic voyage in search of the origin of HIV . . . in Africa

(Patton, 1988: 85)

The 'Great Chain of Being'

The 'green monkey theory', by placing lower primates at the beginning of some alluded infectious chain, with Africans, gay men and IV drug users the next in line serves to impose a sort of 'Darwinian' primitiveness upon black people, homosexuals and drug dependents. It's as if they are in evolutionary terms, unadvanced and prone to uncivilised behaviour. As Christopher C. Taylor points out, it is similar to the eighteenth and nineteenth century belief in the "great chain of being" (Taylor, 1990: 59). This tenet maintained that there "was a gradual rise of beings from the least exalted to the most divine". It proposed a naturally bequeathed pecking-order of sorts, where "human races were arranged hierarchically according to their proximity or distance from divinity". Of course, the throngs of African 'savages' occupied a very low rung of this human evolutionary ladder whereas the originators of this nonsense, white European males, were second only to angels. The belittling of a people by associating them with an even lower member of the 'great chain of being', specifically monkies, can be seen in the depictions of the Irish as the apelike 'Biddy and Paudeen' in the nineteenth century British journal Punch. Invoking animal imagery not only lampooned the Irish, but also denigrated and disparaged the nation. It tarnished the population of this island with notions of a lack of sophistication and civilisation and barbaric tendencies. The promoting of the 'green monkey' theory today has the same effect on the people of Africa. Not only are they perceived to be backward, primitive and monkey-like, they are also deemed culpable for spreading disease and infection, pollution and contamination.

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The lure of the debased

It is interesting to note that the association of homosexuality with savagery and primitive desires has a precedent. The case of Irish nationalist and social reformer, Roger Casement, earlier in this century, links homosexual acts with those who reside at the lower end of the 'great chain of being'. Casement documented the European exploitation of the indigenous peoples of Africa and South America. During his trial for his activities in then 1916 rising, his personal diaries (which were recently proven to be authentic and not forgeries as had been suspected for decades) were widely circulated. His relish for anal sex and his insatiable sexual appetite served to sway public opinion against him and he was sent to the gallows. The consensus was that Casements association with 'debauched savages' had in turn rendered him debauched. Indeed, he was perceived to have become so 'beastly' and his desires so despicable that he became known as the 'Irish monster'.

The concept that savagery can be in someway contagious, can also be seen in the comments of the missionary Joseph Johnston in 1897. He noted that he had been

increasingly struck by the rapidity with which such members of the white race as are not of the best class, can throw over the restraints of civilisation and develop into savages of unbridled lust and abominable cruelty.

(Watney, 1994: 121)

This point is relevant in the context of AIDS. It suggests homosexuality and such savage-like behaviour is, in a sense, seductive to 'civilised society'. Once exposed to such degeneracy, ones weakness can be exposed and one succumbs to these 'forbidden pleasures'. We are all prone to 'unbridled lust' and it is our own self-will and societies dictates which prevent us from sliding down into the realm of 'barbaric and perverse'. Nancy Reagan's eighties anti-drugs slogan, "just say no!" attests to this particle block the last of the set of the control of a field second control of the set o

point. Were the lure of drugs not so powerful there would be no need to say no. The good and the virtuous say 'no' to their submerged appetites, but were these appetites not so universally alluring there would be no need to resist. This is perhaps where the notion of gay people and drug users as deviant elements in society stems. These 'degenerate' groups have submitted to enticing, pleasurable activities - that is forbidden sex and substance induced euphoric highs. They have allowed their selfish desires of self-gratification take precedence unlike the rest of society who quell such primitive urges and restrain themselves. These people have a wanton lack of self-control, they are devoid of civility, thus they are savage-like and animalistic. AIDS is the scourge of the deviant, so therefore AIDS must be some consequence of deviancy. Gay men are morally weak, intravenous drug users are lacking in willpower and black Africans are inadequate beings - all are in someway feeble. Disease itself is a manifestation of feebleness. Therefore that the feeble should be diseased seems logical and this is the potent stigma of AIDS and HIV.

From transexuals to skulls

As the case of Dr. Joseph Carroll and his deeming of gays to be a diseased entity so as to sway public opinion against the decriminalisation of homosexuality shows, AIDS 'the illness', detached from its realities, is manipulated and moulded as fodder to fuel varying self-seeking concerns. Within the sphere of the popular media, AIDS and HIV have been, to borrow Derek Jameson's phrase, "like a gift from God . . . an old fashioned scare story" (Lesbian and Gay Media Group, 1985: 3). As far as the tabloid press is concerned, news is what sells papers, rather than what is important, true or topical. For example, witness the numerous occasions on which the pathetic frolicking of Charles, Di and Camilla have usurped the Bosnian war, the Chechen debacle or similar strife, from the front pages. In *A plague on you - AIDS, the Media and the Truth*, the Lesbian and Gay Media Group cite the criteria for the newsworthiness of a story to be, "sensation, shock, sex, death, shadiness, criminality, drugs,

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gossip, or Royalty (entertainers are an acceptable substitute or, at a push, politicians)" (Lesbian and Gay Media Group, 1985: 3). AIDS 'the illness' certainly meets the sordidness of the.criteria and thus lends itself to exploitation. It fits neatly in with the tabloid presses penchant for reporting on the more lewd aspects of sex - incest rape, paedeophilia and so on. This particular media genre is also notoriously homophobic: tabloid columnists such as the *Suns*' Gary Bushell frequently rant about that most demonic of creatures - 'the poofta'. This ideology stems from the dominant ethos of the popular media which is essentially middle class, male and heterosexual. The average reader is assumed to be also heterosexual and most likely in a nuclear family - that is the media's norms. Thus, homosexuals and homosexuality are naturally portrayed as abnormal. Because AIDS is the perceived scourge of the 'perverted gays', the media have the ideal excuse to give their prejudices free rein and hence simplistic notions of 'blame' and 'plague' are peddled willy-nilly.

The "major two part probe" into the epidemic undertaken by the Sunday World in August 1989 epitomises these points. Of course, the "probe" was not provoked by the abhorrence of the plight of the gay and IV drug using communities who at that time suffered the brunt of infections in Ireland, but rather from the realisation that the "deadly plague virus" was seeping into the 'general population'. Again it is the dominant heterosexual ethos of the media addressing its alluded solely heterosexual, non-drug taking constituency. Headlines scream that "From now to the end of the century the plague will effect every aspect of our lives" (Sunday World, 27 August 1989, pp.20) thus evoking the debilitating and negative associations the plague metaphor possesses. As I've already pointed out, the word carries with it very vivid connotations of divine wrath and deadly virulence. This concept is further reiterated by exclamations such as "AIDS, its snowballing!", "What horrors will it bring us all" and "A frightening future for Ireland". The language is emotionally charged, foreboding and apocalyptic. Although the actual body of text of

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the article is largely rational and factual, detailing the governments inactivity and statistical information on the viruses epidiomology in Ireland, it is dressed in this sensational clothing. The "AIDS Victims" it documents are exclusively gay men, IV drug users and returning emigrants "harbouring" the virus - that is the ostracised and the banished; the emigrants physically, the gay community sexually and the IV drug users socially. Therefore, the articles are indicative of the dual stigma of AIDS the demonising of disease by the plague metaphor coupled with the association with otherness and difference by confining it to stigmatised and excluded groups.

Perhaps the most telling element of the articles is the employment of graphic images of ominous skulls which litter the pages of the reports (FIG. 2.1). The main gist of the articles is the bleak future AIDS and HIV present us with as we inch towards the year two thousand. To reiterate this foreboding thinking, the three zeros of two thousand are substituted by three human skulls, thus calling upon quite a lazy and uninventive graphic technique. It is such negative iconographic representation that Sander L. Gilman likens to that of the syphilis. Derived from the long established traditional depictions of the leper, it is one of degeneracy, pollution and corruption. Prior to the late eighteenth century, the image of the syphilitic was primarily that of the male 'victim', isolated and bearing the symptoms of the disease with the everpresent suggestion of sexual deviancy. During the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the emphasis of the iconography of syphilis shifted to that of the female 'source'. From the high middle ages, woman was depicted in varying visual imagery as both seductive and physically corrupt, and by the eighteenth century the corrupt female is associated with signs of a specific disease - syphilis. Gilman explains that, "The change here is . . . from the innate corruption of the female to her potential for corrupting the male" (Gilman, 1989: 96). Its a sort of scape-goating process, an assigning of blame which occurred. It is paralleled by the skull imagery of the Sunday





FIG. 2.1 The 'ominous skulls' of the *Sunday Worid* article from August 1989.



FIG. 2.2 Eighteenth century plate depicting the decapitated head of a syphilitic prostitute.



World article. The skull or emaciated face was a common visual metaphor for the syphilitic prostitute dating from the eighteenth century (Fig. 2.2). That the Sunday World articles speak of the plight of gays and IV drug users under the graphic skull imagery and then talks of fears of potential spread to the general - i.e. heterosexual - population, the underlying alignment is made: just as the female as syphilitic posed a threat to the male, the gay and IV drug using communities as "carriers" of the "deadly plague virus" pose a threat to the general population.

An even more startling parallel with the iconography of syphilis and that of AIDS was made in May 1994 when the Irish Sun ran a cover story headlined My AIDS Hell. The report concerned the revelation by Irish transexual Rebecca Tallon - formerly Ross Tallon - that she discovered, following one of her sex changing operations, that she was HIV positive. However, the photograph accompanying the story depicts a rather despondent and sullen Tallon trudging forlornly along a desolate beach. Thus, the two depictions of the syphilitic are united. Firstly the image of the diseased as isolated and detached - there is nowhere more solitary than the sea-front on a dismal day - and secondly, the physically corrupted and diseased female. That Tallon is a transexual and transexuality is grouped with homosexuality and transvestitism as separate manifestations of the one perversion in popular belief (although, in reality, they are in no way aligned or related), this depiction also points to homosexuals as a diseased entity. Therefore to apply the thinking behind historic iconography of syphilis to AIDS and HIV, all one need do is substitute the feminised weak male, the homosexual, for the 'weaker sex, - woman. This runs contrary to the National Union of Journalists Guidelines for reporting on Homosexuality which notes the similarity in the stereotyped images of women - "often representing them solely as wives, mothers, homemakers, passive, sexually submissive and physically weak, servicing the needs of men" - with the pejorative, inadequate labels put on gays - "poofta, lessie, queer, pansy, bent" (NUJ Equality Council et al,

"Guidelines on the Reporting on Homosexuality": 2). AIDS, when used in the same manner as syphilis iconography, reiterates this false presentation.



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Chapter Three

Turning the tables: 'HIV positivity' and its manipulation.

AIDS: the 'Cause Celeb'!

In the two previous chapters I have detailed the manipulation of AIDS the 'illness' in terms of the stigmas it has inherited - the historical stigma of illness and societies tendency to demonise disease coupled with the stigmatisation of AIDS, derived from its association with deviant elements in society, a legacy of the initial reporting of the epidemic. However, having mentioned the more standard forms of exploitation of HIV and AIDS, I shall now examine the more recent phenomenon of manipulating the virus in a more perverse way, which appears to run contrary to traditional treatment by society and the media of disease. Despite its associated stigmas - or possibly even because of them - AIDS has achieved the status of what Julie Burchill terms a 'cause celeb'(Burchill,"Beware the AIDS Brigade", Cosmopolitan, April 1992). It has assumed the mantel held by successive concerns about 'feeding the world' and supporting the anti-apartheid campaign and worries about holes in the ozone layer and apocalyptic greenhouse effect. The "battle against AIDS" has become the nineties fashionable bandwagon. Within certain spheres, AIDS has developed an aura of importance. Incessant glamourous benefit balls littered with countless celebrities parading their sequin encrusted red ribbons have imbued AIDS with a discernable 'trendiness'. That is not to say AIDS is something to go out and get, as it were, but rather the 'battle against AIDS' is something to align yourself with. For example the recent Hot Dog Bitch Ball held at the Kitchen nightclub to 'celebrate' World AIDS Day 1994 had precious little to do with disease and a lot to do with social preening.

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By mouthing concerns about the worlds starving millions, or the depletion of the rainforests or the plight of 'AIDS victims', society serves to distract itself from the realities of the problems it is agonising over. When we sing 'Feed the World', the fact that third world development is being seriously hampered by crippling debts to first world banks is ignored. We conveniently disregard that for every pound given in aid to the downtrodden masses in Africa, two pounds is returned to the west in order to pay interest on these loans. When we cried into our coffee during the star-studded self-indulgence that was Live Aid, we didn't pause to consider the fact that cash-crops such as coffee are being grown in place of foods which would feed these people. This pseudo-concern has an exculpatory function in that, by making superficial gestures, we somehow exonerate ourselves. It is a shallow attempt to exorcise and expunge a collective guilt-trip, as it were.

Token posturing

And for all these 'cause celebs' proclamations and wishful thinking, very little actual change occurs as a result of them. Were 'Live Aid' anything more than an ersatz gushing of public concern, would the horn of Africa be as troubled as it is today? - witness the Sudanese famine in the late eighties or the more recent strife in Somalia. Equally had the consequence of our turning green been more than ozone-friendly deodorants, washing powder eco-friendly refill bags and unleaded petrol, would environmental destruction have carried on unabated. What I am saying is that jumping the fashionable bandwagon that is AIDS today, reeks of the tokenism that marred the social concerns treated in this manner before it. The narrow perception of what the specific problem entails becomes the focus of these public outpouring. But these perceptions often belie the realities. For example, Bob Geldof's Band Aid and Live Aid, focused on the 1984 famine in Ethiopia. But the whole premise of these efforts was based on aid, as their names indicate. However it is not aid alone which will help developing nations overcome

their severe economic and social problems. It is trade. Proper, equal, non-exploitative trade. We must allow these nations become full members of the global economic community. We must stop treating them with colonial disregard and indifference. Gestures such as melting down your wedding ring so as a few bags of grain may be sent to Africa as a number of Irishwomen did for Live Aid are essentially hollow - they are certainly dramatic, but their effect is minuscule. Rather, if the same women filled their weekly shopping trolleys with products which didn't exploit the third world, the effect would be far more tangible and longlasting. Giving donations doesn't solve anything. Cancelling third world debts even just the interest - would. But Live Aid didn't tackle these issues. It dealt with the developing world in a superficial, facile manner. It distracted our attention from the root cause for global inequality - us, the West.

Exploiting the hip

Apart from performing an exculpatory function for society, 'cause celebs' also have a role within the sphere of consumerism - they are manipulated as a means by which commercial organisations can imbue their products with a certain currency and social conscience. Companies which made extraordinary contributions to Live Aid revelled in the subsequent limelight whilst the global spectacular that was the simultaneous marathon concert in Philadelphia and London revived many a flagging pop career. But this latching on to a 'cause celeb' really came to the fore with the advent of 'green consciousness' in the late eighties. With the discovery of the hole in the ozone layer came the realisation that the CFC gases used among other things as aerosol propellants were the cause. Thus, for fear consumers would reject their hairsprays and deodorants because they weren't environmentally friendly, the manufacturers of these products disowned CFCs and took to labelling their goods, with much fanfare, with the words 'ozone friendly'. That the bulk of CFC gases can be found in industry and that the tubing in some

fridges as opposed to aerosols is the source of most domestic CFCs was ignored. People became attracted to buying CFC-free hairspray as it was seen as a confirmation of your commitment to preserving the worlds ecology, even though, meanwhile, your fridge probably happily emitted the gases in the corner. Similarly in a wave of 'save the rainforest' rhetoric, the commercial world realised that by making simple cosmetic changes to products, one could align them with the trend in green thinking. Paper products which were not made from recycled paper began to be emblazoned with the familiar 'recycle' logo. The legend underneath read, 'recyclable' rather that 'recycled' subtly making the distinction between the possibility of being recycled and being actually recycled, even though these products were more likely to end up in a landfill than any recycling plant. Companies adopted the outer garb of the green movement to appeal to the latest 'cause celeb' thinking. It gave their products a currency.

The 'merits' of sickness

While one can hardly say AIDS possess this ability to render products more attractive, within the realm of youth culture it possesses the ability to imbue them with a sort of 'progressiveness'. This is because AIDS as intrinsically linked with sex and the common perception is that it is a permissive sex. Again, this perception relates to the social construct of AIDS the 'illness' rather than the biological malfunctions that is AIDS the 'disease'. As I've already pointed out, it's AIDS the 'illness' which forms people's interputation of the affliction. That there is a precedent in this favourable regard for an ailment, detached from its reality, can be seen in the case of tuberculosis. While consumptives were more usually shunned by society, among some bohemians the disease garnered a certain glamour. According to Susan Sontag,

tuberculosis was regarded throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (indeed, until it was discovered how to cure it) as a disease apt to strike the hypersensitive, the talented,

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the passionate.

(Sontag, 1989: 12).

Romantic poets like John Keats were all but canonised for dying at the age of 26 from consumption. Equally the vision of Chopin coughing up blood on the keys imbued him with an almost heroic status among his peers. The notion of dying young and enduring pain and suffering seemingly appealed to the artistic sensibility of the time. This connection made since the era of romantic writers is paralleled by the "link . . . made between syphilis and heightened ('feverish') mental activity." (Sontag, 1989: 23). Indeed, the practice of consuming copious quantities of the liquor absinthe was championed by some artists and writers because it brought on brain disease thought to heighten bohemian sensitivities. The alignment of an illness with "rarefied artistic and erotic sensibilities" serves to ennoble the illness, observes Christopher C. Taylors (Feldman, 1990: 56). Gay sex is certainly viewed as a "rarefied erotic sensibility" in that gay people are the minority. And as a 'cause celeb', AIDS 'the illness' is rendered ennoble.

Rock versus Mercury

The fact that AIDS could subvert its more traditional stigmas and in some perverse way be glorified worried a number of commentators at the time of Queen frontman Freddie Mercury's death in late 1991. Mercury was openly and unapologetically bisexual and his voracious omnisexual appetite is well documented - he once claimed he never slept with the same person twice. Yet rather than being chastised for his wanton promiscuity at the time of his death, a curious beatification took place. Queen's seventies epic 'Bohemian Rhapsody' became the Christmas number one and proved to be 1991s biggest selling single. A mammoth tribute concert was held the following year in Wembley Stadium doubling as an 'AIDS awareness' extravaganza. The genial hullabaloo that



immediately followed Mercury's demise contrasts strongly with that which succeeded Rock Hudson's death in the mid eighties. Six-foot-five, square jawed and broad shouldered Hudson was the epitome of American maleness in films such as 'All that Heaven Allows' during the fifties. In reality, he was a closeted gay. Having succumbed to the virus in July 1985, Hudson was literally vilified by the press. The Daily Mail printed before and after photographs depicting the actor during his cinematic hey-day and an emaciated Hudson in the final stages of his illness with the pointed text, "the two faces of Hollywood - vibrant, virile . . . dissipated, corrupt, decadent - captured on the two faces of Rock Hudson ..." (Watney, 1989: 89). Corruption and decadence are hardly glamourous qualities. Hudson was scorned after his death whereas Mercury was nothing less than extolled. So much so that weeks after Mercury's death Colin McClelland in his Dublin Days column in the Sunday World wrote on the phenomenon under the headline "It's fashionable to be a dead Fred!". He remarks that "AIDS is no longer considered to be something disgraceful or abhorrent; it now confers on the victim a type of celebrity and morbid charm . . .". This tendency is diametrically opposed to the disparagement heaped on Hudson. Indeed, it is inconceivable that 'All that Heaven Allows' would have been re-run as a tribute to Hudson the same way as the re-release of 'Bohemian Rhapsody' served to be for Mercury. As to why this change in perspective occurred, McClelland surmises that

the only way we can deal with the plague that is striking down so many of our idols and so many of the faces we are familiar with on our television screens, is to accord the disease some sort of celebrity status. A bit like the business tycoons who now measure their success not in terms of wealth accumulated, but in the number of heart attacks they have managed to survive. If you can't avoid it glorify it.

('.... dead Fred!', December 1991, Sunday World).

This hypothesis is somewhat simplistic and the reasoning is more

complex. A number of diseases pose omnipresent threats to public health but are not similarly exalted - for example cancers, as I've discussed in the previous chapter possess a potent stigma with precious little saving virtue. It is a more probable that because Mercury was a popstar, and therefore a youth culture icon that he achieved the glorification that eluded Hudson. Mary Kenny speaks of this facet in her article *Freddie's story - the moral* which appeared in the Irish Independent in November 1991. Kenny describes Mercury's lifestyle as "wildly promiscuous", "recklessly priapic" and "extravagantly immoral" and states that

Parents will undoubtedly hope that the impact is one that warns youngsters of the mortal dangers in Freddie's life choices, rather than one that martyrises his untimely death.

(Freddie's story. . ., Irish Independent: November 1991).

While her article is somewhat scaremongering in that she expresses fears that hordes of misinformed youth will mimic their idols "life choices" and wilfully contract the virus and there is an underlying homophobic tone for "life choice" read gay - she does acknowledge the impressionability of youth and the undeniable conferring of glory on Mercury. However, she is off the mark in stating that the possible consequence of Freddie being "canonised" as the emblem of AIDS hero is "that his lifestyle which was the undisputed cause of death, was in a reckless way romantic" and thus be appealing. Impressionability is not, however, synonymous with idiocy, and Mary Kenny seems to have misread the situation and given young people little credit. They are well informed on the intricacies of AIDS the disease, more so than their parents and are unlikely to be duped into any "life choices" because of the posthumous hyping of a pop star. However that he was posthumously hyped at all unlike Hudson, is indicative of the tendency in the nineties, especially within the realm of youth culture, to imbue AIDS with a celebrity status. That this just isn't a consequence of some extraordinarily high standing of Mercury among the young can be seen in the vilification he received following Queen

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playing at Sun City in apartheid South Africa. He was by no means uniformly adored. It's not that in beatifying Mercury the young may want to imitate, rather than repudiate his way of life, as Kenny asserts, but rather they are jumping on the fashionable bandwagon that is AIDS in the nineties.

AIDS activism and the 'gay garb'

As to how AIDS has become a 'cause celeb', and become a social phenomenon which appears to be diametrically opposed to the polluting stigma discussed in the previous chapter, one must examine the role of AIDS activism, specifically Act Up. Act Up is the punchy acronym standing for the 'AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power'. Founded in March 1987 by tireless gay agitator Larry Kramer, Act Up deems itself to be "a diverse, nonpartisan group united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis" (Crimp, 1990: 13). Intrinsically antagonistic and belligerent, they belong to the tradition of political activism. Their main tools are finely orchestrated rallies, acts of civil disobedience and the staging of contrived publicity events. Gran Fury, Act Up's unofficial propaganda ministry and "guerrilla graphic designers" have adopted a style which is direct, arresting and confrotational. However, added to this, Act Up have also inherited the garb of the gay liberation movement. Despite professing to be a "diverse" group, Act Up willingly admit their membership is not particularly varied - the bulk are white, middle class gay men. Even the title of the group, Act Up, which is an abbreviation pronounced as a word is indicative of peculiarly gay relish for punful acronyms - witness the lesbian civil rights group COYOTE which stands for 'Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics' or P-FLAG, 'Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays'. Indeed, one of their more popular rally chants proclaims "Act Up, we're here! We're loud and rude, pro-choice and queer!". As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the gay liberation movement prior to AIDS was raucous and hedonistic. Sexual permissiveness was rife. The whole premise of the of the gay liberation

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was founded on sex and fun. A good time was the priority. Therefore, the visual symbols and images adopted by the movement were equally frivolous, colourful and playful. The rainbow flag is an example of this. The flag, composed of stripes of bright vivid colours, first appeared in San Francisco at the 1978 Gay and Lesbian Freedom day parade. It represents the diversity of the gay community and has spawned a myriad of rainbow accessories such as freedom rings and even towels and tumblers decorated with the rainbow flag colours. Heather Findlay, speaking of the rainbow flag and its ilk, states that "lesbian and gay men have compensated for our obscurity by inventing a whole pantheon of 'signifiers' . . . that proclaim our proclivities" ("Culture Shock - Gay 101", Out, July/August 1994: 84). The most popular gay sign is the pink triangle. Culled from its mournful context in the Holocaust, where Nazis used it to identify male homosexual prisoners in concentration camps, gay activists have transformed the pink triangle into a household symbol of queer desire. The most famous Act Up graphic the 'silence = death' image (FIG. 3.1) utilises the symbol which shows the AIDS activist tendency to adopt the frivolous garb of the gay movement. The simple graphic emblem - silence = death printed in white gill sanserif type underneath a pink triangle - has come to signify AIDS activism to an entire community of people confronting the epidemic. As Douglas Crimp points out,

our emblem's significance depends on foreknowledge of the use of the pink triangle as a marker of gay men in Nazi concentration camps, its appropriation by the gay movement to remember the suppressed history of our oppression and inversion of its positioning (men in the death camps wore triangles that pointed down). Silence about the oppression and annihilation of gay people, then and now, must be broken as a matter of our survival

(Crimp, 1990: 15).

This equation under the pink triangle has become synonymous with AIDS and the activist movement. The fact that it adorns not only placards and posters now, but also t-shirts, badges and stickers attest to its popularity.

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But the overt alignment of AIDS and the gay community by using such imagery serves to reiterate the common perception in the west that it's a gay affliction - the equation could almost read gay equals AIDS. AIDS activism has the effect of giving credence to the myths surrounding AIDS, because AIDS activism is almost an exclusively gay phenomenon and because of their penchant for using gay imagery. As to how this can render AIDS a 'cause celeb' and youth culture advertising tool, one must examine the progression of Act Up graphics from this first image.

Action = Life: HIV positivity

The deeper message contained within the 'silence = death' graphic is not obvious unless one is familiar with the history of the pink triangle symbol. However, the equation does possess a strong impact - it is direct, concise and startling. But it is also somewhat morbid and melancholy. It is devoid of positivity. So as to counteract this negativity, Act Up came up with a less dark equation, 'action = life'. To compliment the optimism of the words, the doomladen pink triangle was replaced by two rather energetic frolicking figures drawn in a quirky style. The rather depressing field of black was replaced by a brighter background of white. It is this particular graphic which epitomised the 'HIV positivity' which became attractive within the realm of youth culture. It is still a very queer image due to its dynamism and playful frivolity but is less ominous than its 'silence = death' predecessor. An article in the now defunct teenage pop magazine, Number One, in early 1990 shows the appeal of the more positive image. During an interview with pop icon Jimmy Somerville, he is asked to catalogue his "most favourite things in the world". He lists as his "favourite item of clothing" the Act Up t-shirt emblazoned with the 'action = life' image (FIG. 3.2). In justifying this choice, Jimmy tells us that

This is my favourite shirt (Act Up) have done... I just think its really sweet, its quite sexual as well, which makes it animated and loud, because their other T-shirts were so gloomy, about





FIG. 3.1 The Act Up 'Silence = Death' poster and sticker





Jimmy Somerville as featured in teen pop magazine *Number One* in 1990 wearing the Act Up 'action = life' shirt.

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silence = death, and it shows AIDS activism can be fun.

(Number One, January 1990: pp. 8-10)

Jimmy Somervilles' words are very telling. The t-shirt is treated with a tangible queer sensibility - it is "animated and loud" - and he thus deems it to be "sweet", "sexual" and "fun". These are not adjectives which could be applied to the image of AIDS presented in the Sunday World with their collection of skulls but they rest comfortably in this construct of the illness. While the Sunday Worlds skulls represents a sort of HIV defeatism, Jimmy Somervilles' "favourite item of clothing" is an example of HIV positivity. Belonging to the same trend are Keith Harrings AIDSrelated drawings. Harring, who succumbed to the virus in early 1990, had a peculiarly cartoonish style which was quirky and fun (FIG. 3.3). He collaborated with Act Up on numerous safer sex posters and his images are always playful and irreverent. Because of their cartoonish quality, they have a tremendous youth appeal. It is an ongoing trend that the initial seriousness and heavy political content of early Act Up graphics such as silence = death has been subsumed by the more loud, brash colourfulness of action = life,. It is this very gay 'joie de vivre' and ebullience evident in this work which appeals to the youth.

The old and the new: differing presentations of AIDS

This change within the activist movement, to view AIDS with less despondency, is illustrated by two Act Up plays, one dating from the eighties, the other from the nineties. The first play, the Normal Heart by Larry Kramer is not strictly speaking an 'Act Up play' since it was premiered in New York on 21 April 1985 and thus precedes the founding of Act Up. However, the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power was essentially Kramer's brainchild and we can assert that his play falls into the sphere of AIDS activism in that its pure political drama. The Normal Heart is quite a sombre piece of theatre and was essentially a diatribe of the government and public indifference which characterised the early days of

the epidemic. Contrasted with Kramer's gritty realism was perhaps the most bizarre manifestation of Act Up's penchant for dramatics (quite literally!) AIDS! The Musical! staged in Santa Monica, California, on August 2 1991.(Roman, 1993: 220). Produced by the 'Sodomy Players', in close affiliation with Act Up/Los Angeles, AIDS! The Musical! purported to be more than just a theatrical extravagance confined within the realm of light entertainment. Rather, it sought, as its press releases stated, to be "an all singing, all dancing, all queer voyage into a world of AIDS activism, new age gatherings, sleazy sex clubs, radical fairies, lesbian love, and fags bashing back!" (Roman, 1993: 222). The musicals writers, Wendell Jones and David Stanley, chart the emotional and political development of Thomas, a person with AIDS. He discovers and explores "political activism, spirituality, violence and healing in a gay and lesbian community torn apart by a decade of deaths and government indifference" (Roman, 1993: 223). AIDS! The Musical!, is than Act Up's gripes and misgivings presented onstage accompanied by a musical score. Its content, like Kramer's play, is quite heavy, yet unlike the Normal Heart it was promoted in a very light-hearted, jovial manner. The ludicrous title attest to this point as do the cartoonish promotional slogans - "You've had the disease, you've been to the demonstration, now see the musical!" and "Even during a plague, there's a time to sing" (FIG. 3.4). This banter belongs to the realm of the kitsch. The promotional poster features a four piece impromptu chorus line, all members with cheesy grins and dressed in the obligatory 'silence = death' and Keith Harring t- shirts. It's as if AIDS has surpassed the role of illness. These people are denying the 'sick role'. Larry Kramer's 'The Normal Heart' exudes seriousness and importance. The nineties musical reeks of frivolity.

AIDS has been imbued with a of positive ambiance, at least superficially, which runs contrary to the stigmas it more traditionally possesses. The concerted efforts of gay activists have achieved this. They




FIG. 3.3 A Keith Harring AIDS poster sponsored by Act Up.





Promotional poster for 'AIDS! The Musical!' staged in Santa Monica, California on 2 August 1991.



were unwilling to allow AIDS 'the illness' wallow in a mire of negativity and pollution. By using the mechanisms available within the gay culture - dynamism, camp, shock, humour - they have created a vision of AIDS which runs contrary to plague and hell metaphors. Of course, the realities of the disease are untouched, the perception, that is the illness is transformed. This transformation can only occur within atmospheres which are conducive to the queer sensibility - namely within the realm of 'showbusiness' and among the enlightened youth (witness the spate of openly gay pop icons from Little Richard to Dusty Springfeild to Sylvester to The Pet Shop Boys). It's a phenomenon which is similar to the ennobling of TB among romantic poets. Of course, favourable images of illness are as equally as metaphoric a line of thought as stigmas are: they belie the realities, they are a warped perception.

The red ribbon epidemic

The key symbol of the AIDS epidemic in the nineties has been the red ribbon. I have already recounted how gay activists transformed the Nazi pink triangle into a recognised icon for queerness. AIDS activists pulled a similar stunt vis-a-vis the yellow ribbon - a military memento used most recently to bring to mind soldiers of U.S. fortune in the Gulf War - when they simply changed it to a more vibrant, dynamic colour, and developed a graphic emblem for AIDS. Its usage is universal and ubiquitous, in fact so much so, that one could say we are in the throes of a 'red ribbon epidemic'. They've become a sort of fashion accessory - a red ribbon on ones lapel indicates your social consciousness. It has become the symbol of the 'cause celeb' that is the AIDS and HIV epidemic in the nineties, just as much as the graphic image composed of the amalgamation of the map of Africa with the neck of a guitar which served as the emblem of Live Aid in the mid eighties. It is as much a regulatory fashion accessory on Oscar night as the black bow-tie.

At the recent Concert of Hope extravaganza held at the Wembley

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Arena and attended by that most ardent stalwart of AIDS benefits and balls, princess Diana, the pop group Take That strutted about the stage in t-shirts emblazoned with red ribbons composed of glittering sequins. That Gary, Howard, Jason, Robbie and Mark, the darlings of hordes of teenage girls (and indeed boys), could be seen parading the 'AIDS symbol' on their well-toned, voluptuous pectorals is indicative of the way AIDS the illness has achieved a certain glamour and glitz. AIDS the 'cause celeb' has become romanticized, glorified and sentimentalised. But that Take That have decided AIDS is a viable cause to support is also an example of the current trend to utilise AIDS as a marketing tool within the realm of youth culture. Benetton, the Body Shop and MTV, all youth orientated commercial concerns, are all party to this exploitation, perhaps the most perverse manipulation of disease.

Youth culture - 'a tide in the veins of youth'

The invention of the concept of youth culture stems from the surge of mass culture after the Second World War when wartime production gave way to peacetime consumption. The 'teenager' was invented in 1945 as a category of market research by nineteen year old Eugene Gilbert. While still studying at Chicago University, he founded Gil-bert Teenage Services, offering advertisers a range of services to enable them reach those very customers he was defining, shaping and categorising. His companies promotional blurb read "You want copy that talks to the guys and gals in their own language? We can write it for you! You want fresh ideas, groovy stuff? We can turn it out!" (Rees 1986: 2). The affluence of youth and their freedom from financial obligations is the primary influence on the emergence of the teenage consumer. Because the young generally lack the constraints of dependent siblings or the burdens of mortgages, they transferred their power as consumers to the pursuit of pleasure. A consequence of this is the power of goods to establish youthfulness and in-group membership. Youth culture is in a constant state of flux and is dictated by trends. The "groovy stuff' of the "guys



and gals" is constantly changing. This can be seen in the spate of youth subcultures witnessed in the past five decades - from teds to mods to skinheads to punks to ravers and so on. Youth subcultures are characterised by obsessions with style and are governed by street fashions. But while the clothes may differ from subculture to subculture, a wilful nihilism and anti-establishment doctrine permeates throughout all the diverse manifestations. However, advertising copywriter Robin Weeks asserts that

There is really no such thing any more than there is 'middle aged culture' or 'oldie culture'. People are as eclectic and individual at 16 as they are at 61; it's just that at 16 you're a little more susceptible to peer group pressure."

(Ads. International, Autumn 1994: 16).

That said, I would add that there is also a peculiarly defiant and irrelevant sensibility which also unites youth into some semblance of a distinct culture. It has been asserted that adolescence as a definable grouping is an artificial construct. The false assumption that there is such a thing as 'adolescence' which must be handled in a wholly different way from any other part of human experience, appears officially for the first time, John Bazalgette tells us, in the Hadlow Report of the Education of the Adolescent. The report contains the remark, "There is a tide which begins to rise in the veins of youth at the age of eleven or twelve. It is called by the name adolescence" (Bazalgette, 1976: 4). The danger in the assumption of 'adolescence' as an identifiable stage is not that it lacks a clearly identifiable beginning (the onset of puberty), but that it has not got a definable end. Bazalgette asserts that what begins to show itself amongst children aged about eleven or twelve is not 'adolescence' but early adulthood - it is a time of the apprentice adult. It is the beginning of the conscious recognition that each person has a distinct identity and a capacity to be autonomous and for both to exist in an intelligible context. The young person from the age of twelve begins to ask himself the question 'What authority have adults over me and what authority have I

in my relationships with them?' The tide the *Hadlow Report* spoke of is this burgeoning independence manifested in teenage defiance (Bazalgette, 1976: 4).

As Helen Rees points out, the "temptation to make money from identifying trends becomes impossible to resist" but "the youths ... heightened sensitivity and growing sophistication, makes marketing all the more difficult" (Rees, 1986: conclusion). Although the teenager may have been a marketing invention, commercial concerns can not impose styles or trends on the young, but can only feed off those invented by the young themselves. As Alan Moseley points out, "mirroring a youth trend never works, just look at how awful disco scenes are in films. The most successful campaigns ignore fashions and trends" (Ads. International, Autumn 1994: 17). However, the challenging of conventions and irreverency which is common sensibility of the majority of youth subcultures is the only constant that can be exploited. Moseley cites Nike's "Just do it" advertising campaign as an example of product tapping into the intrinsic culture in the market place. The decisiveness the "Just do it" slogan suggests spans in individual intricacies of differing subculture and appeals to the broad sensibility of youthfulness. AIDS, the illness certainly challenges the social norms. It is linked with deviancy and sexual permissiveness and is thus a suitable candidate for youth culture manipulation.

At the recent Smash Hits Poll Winners Party, the zenith of prepubescent idolatry and pop consumerism, it was those who didn't wear red ribbons who were conspicuous, more so that those that did, so prevalent is this practice now. But a more sophisticated and overtly sexual form of AIDS manipulation to promote commercial interests is also occurring in the older end of the same grouping and it is a blatantly derived from the 'HIV positivity' of more recent AIDS activist material.

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'Lets talk about sex, lets talk about fashion . . .'

Benetton, one of the companies which exploits AIDS in this manner, has actually collaborated with Act Up Paris. To commemorate World AIDS Day 1993, they unfurled a mammoth pink condom over the obelisk in the Place du Concorde (FIG. 3.5). Such 'in your face', as it were, irreverent gratuitous publicity stunts appeal to the youth. But Benetton devoted an issue of their in-house magazine, *Colors*, to AIDS in June 1994. The treatment of AIDS and HIV in *Colors* differs considerably from Benetton's earlier use of the image of a person with AIDS dying surrounded by his family in its notorious series of billboard advertisements. That particular controversial image belongs to the realm of realism, and although it is a manipulation of AIDS for the purpose of self-promotion, it is in no way a glamourisation of the disease.

The issue of Colors dealing with AIDS reeks more of Act Up's confrontationalist techniques and dynamism. Colors purports to be "a magazine about the rest of the world" and is sold in Benetton outlets as well as being available on subscription. It is of course pure, blatant selfpromotion. The 'AIDS issue' came sealed in plastic with a warning sticker stating that "Colors talks openly about AIDS (that's why it's sealed in plastic)". The association is instantly made with Madonna's highly controversial but rather tame book, Sex, which also came concealed within a vacuum sealed plastic bag. It infers that the contents of the magazine are graphic and forthright - if not even titillating. The tone of the magazine can be garnered from the headings on the cover: "Let's talk about fashion. Let's talk about sex. Let's talk about death. Let's really talk about Aids." (FIG. 3.6). That fashion and sex are given priority in that they are listed first is indicative of the construct of AIDS the illness within the realm of youth culture consumerism. Fashion and sex are the main elements which construct this vision and render it so appealing to the youth. Indeed, that the cover features a latex gloved hand giving 'the finger' as it were to the word AIDS and causing the letters to scatter







The pink condom unfurled over the obelisk in the Place Du Concorde by Benetton and Act Up Paris to commemorate World AIDS day 1993.







highlights the point. This is pure confrontational imagery and very youth orientated.

Lampooning the Establishment

It bears resemblance to the 1989 Act Up subway advertising poster and placard which screamed Know Your Scumbags. The placard depicted arch conservative Cardinal O'Connor of New York who was vehemently opposed to the promotion of condom use and the introduction of safer sex teaching, beside an unfurled condom (FIG. 3.7). The legend under the condom read "this one prevents AIDS". The implication is that the 'scumbag', Cardinal O'Connor, whose mitre mimics the shape of the condom, doesn't prevent AIDS. Such 'in your face', anti-establishment imagery is apparent throughout the Benetton magazine (FIG. 3.8). For example, Ronald Reagan is lampooned in a similar way. Reagan is widely held as the arch-demon of the AIDS saga. It was his administrations inactivity in the early days of the epidemic which is deemed culpable for the alarming numbers of infections in America today. The 'silence = death' equation actually refers to the fact that Reagan didn't utter the word AIDS in public until 1987, six years after the initial MMWR report. Colors satirically cites Reagan as 'the hero' of the epidemic and in a false obituary details the "courageous leader's" valiant "quick and decisive response". He is satirically depicted as a person with AIDS and the accompanying picture was altered by computer so as the former president appears to be emaciated and his face is marked by kaposi's sarcoma lesions. The ridiculing also extends to Margaret Thatcher who, in her imaginary capacity of United Nations Secretary of AIDS Services applauds Reagan for his "courage and foresight" and "boundless compassion". This lampooning and ridiculing of an establishment figure appeals greatly to the nihilist and sceptic sensibilities that are a part of youth culture. It's a tendency that permeates Benetton's magazine. The photograph accompanying the statement "You don't get AIDS by kissing" in the section dealing with how AIDS is transmitted shows former USSR









FIG. 3.8 The satirical depiction of Ronald Reagan with KS lesions in *Colors*.



president Mikial Gorbachov kissing the deposed East German leader Eric Honniker.

The imagery in Colors is very forthright and direct, reminiscent of Act Up's more explicit graphics. The 1988 Gran Fury poster titled Sexism rears its unprotected head is an example of this tendency. In austere black and white, an erect penis is graphically depicted on the poster. The subheading reads "Men: use condoms or beat it" (FIG. 3.9). This is a playful pun in that "beat it" can be interputted to mean scarper or alternatively, masturbate. This particular poster was commissioned to highlight the fact that women are also susceptible to HIV infection, and there is and underlying humour evident in its execution despite its very serious message. This idea of merging playfulness with explicit material harkens back to the queer penchant for the jovial and sexually direct. The section in Colors dealing with "How do you get HIV?" also echoes this phenomenon. The pages which list the bodily fluids in which HIV lives in infected people feature splatterings of the particular substances. Blood, semen menstrual blood, vaginal fluid, saliva and breast milk are all graphically and vividly represented (the 'splash' on the cover of this thesis is culled from the page which features breast milk). The subsequent section detailing how HIV enters the body is very explicit. Whole pages are devoted to photographs of a persons rectum, and the male and female genitals (FIG. 3.10). This explicitness is again seen in the segments dealing with latex fashions and safer sex techniques. Titillation and shock are the tools by which the information is being departed. It is all very alerting and all very youth orientated. MTV currently run a station identity sequence which has parallels to the explicitness coupled with humour technique. A condom is unfurled on what initially appears to be a penis, intercut with flashing bold lettering telling us that ninety percent of all HIV infections in the nineties are the result of heterosexual activities. It's only when the camera zooms away from the condom that we realise it's not actually a penis which is being clad with latex but the

61

uppermost part of the 'V' of the distinctive MTV logo. Similarly, a derivation of the MTV logo appears in *Colors* with a red ribbon 'pinned on' the 'M', (FIG 3.11) again indicative of the youth culture stations flirting with the garb of AIDS.

But why do these commercial bodies use AIDS as a means of selfpromotion? The answer is that because AIDS and HIV have garnered an anti-establishment aura, a direct consequence of Act Up's lobbying techniques and also because AIDS has evolved into a 'cause celeb', that linking their products with the "battle against AIDS" imbues them with a certain currency and social consciousness. The Body Shop, that most outspoken of environmentally and socially correct commercial companies, has also jumped on the fashionable bandwagon that is AIDS today. Whilst their proclamations on environmental issues are incessant and well known, it seems odd that they have decided to lecture on a sexually transmitted disease. However, it is a concern that the youth, their main consumers, seemingly identify with. Hence, under the guise of HIV and AIDS, the Body Shop has manipulated this concern to serve their own self-promotion and advertisement. Like Benetton and the very youth orientated MTV who devoted as entire section of their social awareness magazine Rock the Vote to the issue, AIDS has become a tool, to seduce the youth market. Their methods are elaborate, but by aligning themselves with the "battle against AIDS" they attempt to entice the youth consumers to purchase their products. It would seem to contradict the polluting, contaminating and stigmatising effect of AIDS presented in chapter two, but it must be remembered that these connotations are rendered invalid by the irreverence of youth culture.





FIG. 3.9

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The 1988 Act Up poster, *Sexism rears its unprotected head*, 'explicit and playful'.



FIG. 3.10 Example of page in *Colors* detailing how HIV is spread.





FIG. 3.11

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The MTV logo with a red ribbon 'pinned on' the 'M' illustrating the youth culture penchant for adopting the garb of the epidemic.



AIDS is a mystery and thus lends itself to be made a metaphor for all that a frightened community may fear or despise. Because it's origins are unknown, speculations as to its alluded beginnings are rife and those held culpable are those who society inherently disregards and disowns. The inference that HIV originated in Africa as purported by the 'green monkey' theory serves to demean that continent while aligning black people with primates simultaneously repeats the colonial myth that they are in evolutionary terms inadequate, primitive and apelike. Equally, the labelling of the epidemic as a 'gay plague' serves to heap the burden of disease, infection, and contamination on the persistently persecuted gay community.

AIDS is no longer simply a disease; AIDS is a tool and a weapon. It may be used to bludgeon and defame as it is the case of the 'green monkey' theory which proved very heady for all racists and creationist or the 'plague' metaphor which was very handy for those zealots who saw gayness as a plague. It is this vision of AIDS and HIV, detached from their realities, which lends itself to be manipulated and moulded as fodder to fuel varying self-seeking concerns. The problem is no longer simply AIDS the disease: the syndrome has spawned an even more sinister phenomenon - the AIDS cudgel. Infused with a plethora of stigmas and prejudices, when wielded it serves to compound societies hates, be it racism or homophobia. Whether called upon by Family Solidarity to discredit the 'homosexual lifestyle' or exploited by the *Irish Sun* to lampoon the much maligned 'poofta', the AIDS cudgel is a potent and virulent weapon.

That AIDS and HIV are at the same imbued with a sort of



'positivity' stems from the need to counteract the trashing those infected more usually endure. AIDS activism, an essentially gay phenomenon, is largely responsible for this presentation of the virus, devoid of despondency and negativity. While their motivation is largely to banish fear and prejudice, so much a hallmark of the epidemic, their mechanisms and techniques have lent AIDS and HIV to be manipulated in a more perverse way. Dressing the disease with the garb of gay ebullience has resulted in it achieving an almost idolatry status, especially within the realm of youth culture. The particularly gay 'joie de vivre' has always appealed to the young and thus, when AIDS is aligned with this sensibility it lends itself to the disconcerting fashioning of the illness as a marketing tool. It is this vision which Benetton, the Body Shop, MTV and such youth orientated commercial groups have utilised as a means of self promotion. Under the guise of awareness and information packages, the publications issued by these companies are nothing short of unashamed, self-seeking marketing coups.

Yet, aren't images which imbue the epidemic with a semblance of hope, whatever their source, beneficial? The answer is no. There is something decidedly unnerving about Benettons leaping on the fashionable bandwagon that is AIDS in the nineties. Their concern is ersatz, their motivation self-seeking. Just as Family Solidarities brandishing of the AIDS cudgel is manipulative, Benetton and their ilk's use of HIV positivity is equally as exploitative. The presentation may differ but the motivation is the same - little concern for the seventeen million presently infected with HIV but very palpable pandering to their self-seeking agendas.

There is something very shameful in the manipulation of disease. When that disease is as serious and devastating as AIDS and HIV which is being transmitted at an alarming rate, the manipulation is the nothing less than despicable. While the exploitation of the phenomenon that is

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'HIV positivity' may not be as injurious and malicious as the 'AIDS cudgel', it has the same effect of distracting from the realities of the syndrome. By strutting around at benefit ball such as the *Hot Dog Bitch Ball* or by festooning your lapel with red ribbons is essentially diverting your attention from the true threat of the epidemic. Equally, when one is embroiled in controversies over the alluded origins of the virus, one is distracting oneself from the realities of the HIV and AIDS.

AIDS is not and should not be anything other than a health issue which we must all confront. It is not a means by which to embellish and promote a commodity, nor is it a means by which to belittle and demean your pet hate. To tackle AIDS and HIV, the dross must be discarded.

The exploitation of disease is contemptible. The World Health Organisation projects that 40 million people worldwide will be infected with the human immunodeficiency virus by the end of the century. It will be interesting to note how many of them shall be wearing a Benetton label.



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