support the participation of workers and nonprofessionals in media production and the use of media for trade union and community organizing."[154] Their statement simply reiterated many of the same tenets that the video guerrillas and public access advocates championed throughout the 1970s.

Despite such protests, the Reagan administration attempted to systematically dismantle the alternative video movement within the United States, along with the rest of the arts. As Patricia Zimmerman chronicles, the Reagan administration began in 1981 "to eliminate public support for culture by defunding endowments by 50 percent and decentralizing all federal funding to the states."[155] Many media access centers that provided vital services for independent video makers folded. WNET's Television Lab collapsed in 1984 due to the lack of funding by CPB.

A new regime had emerged that wanted to privatize communication, seeing it more as a commodity than as a public good. Zimmerman notes the drastic effects this had on independent video: "The cutting off of public funding created a form of ideological and financial quarantine for independent documentary work such that speaking from any racialized, sexualized, ethnicized, or engendered location risked endangerment and annihilation."[156] The lack of federal funding made video remain a distant practice for historically disenfranchised communities in the United States. Where access to expensive equipment and training had been further provided by government investment, it now was curtailed. Only a few select places throughout the country maintained such services.

But many activists and members of the video movement continued to persevere in spite of a massive conservative backlash. They laid crucial infrastructure, tactics, and techniques that would eventually culminate in the explosive growth of media activism over AIDS in the 1980s and the development of satellite transmission for activist video in New York City. AIDS video activists along with Paper Tiger Television and Deep Dish Television extended some of the anarchist media practices already exhibited by the video guerrillas by making them more confrontational and central to their activism. AIDS activism, by default, had to be lifestyle activism since the disease and responses to it affected people's ability to live. But unlike the video guerrillas where lifestyle trumped overt political activism, politics was at the forefront of AIDS activism because people's lives were on the line. The negligence of hierarchical federal and state bureaucracy resulted in the deaths of untold numbers of people, leading AIDS activists and others to prioritize anarchist-inflected media activism that could force the government's hand to take action.

CHAPTER THREE

ACTION=LIFE: AIDS VIDEO ACTIVISM, THE GULF CRISIS, AND SATELLITE DISTRIBUTION

(For Alex)

ACTION=LIFE SERVED AS AN IMPORTANT COUNTER-MEME FOR ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in contrast to their more famous expression Silence=Death. ACT UP's arrival on the scene in 1987 in New York City further radicalized AIDS activism that had begun earlier with groups like Gay Men's Health Crisis and the People with AIDS self-empowerment movement.[1] Action=Life well encapsulates ACT UP's direct-action mentality that used its members' bodies to seize the streets, airwaves, and government buildings to draw attention to the negligence, if not downright hostility, exhibited by the federal and local governments and much of the commercial press against people living with AIDS.

Much has already been written regarding ACT UP's formation and impact.[2] More recently a spate of films produced by former and current ACT UP activists like *United in Anger* (2012), *How to Survive a Plague* (2012), and *Sex in an Epidemic* (2011) chronicle many of the actions ACT UP engaged in throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Although academics like Roger Hallas and Alexandra Juhasz have offered in-depth analyses of the videos produced by and around ACT UP, no one as of yet has connected ACT UP's video activist practices within a longer historical trajectory of video activism within the United States, as well as its relationship with other forms of media activism occurring at the time. If Action=Life, ACT UP was very well aware of the need for coalition-building among AIDS activists and media activists to get a full hearing for their demands of

getting drugs into bodies, as well as popularizing their more systemic analysis of why poor Hispanics and black men and women were being disproportionately impacted by AIDS-related illnesses.

This chapter focuses primarily on the video activism of ACT UP/NY to explore its relationship to other alternative media institutions in New York City like Paper Tiger Television (PTTV) and Deep Dish Television (DDTV), which were crucial in supporting, training, and distributing the work of the video activists of ACT UP. New York City provided a unique environment as a media hub where these coalitions could most fully develop. Also, the state provided critical funding of alternative video through the New York State Council on the Arts as we have already seen in the previous chapter. Because of these valuable resources and its highly concentrated area that brought together extremely talented and savvy media activists, Manhattan served as a hotbed of video activism that reshaped itself into a much more aggressive direct-action, spectacle-based form.

As we saw in the previous chapter, a series of video guerrilla groups had already been integrating video production and distribution into their daily lives. Collectives like the Videofreex and People's Video Theatre explicitly saw such appropriation of video into everyday practices in explicitly political terms. Yet they shied away from aggressively using video to intervene into national debates and almost unanimously rejected more commercial forms of video production. Although TVTV attempted to recast guerrilla video in more commercial-friendly forms, they were an outlier from the general outlook of most groups at the time.

The direct-action video activism associated with ACT UP, however, not only saw videotaping as a direct form of intervention during street actions but also employed quick, clever editing, the use of music, and other popular culture devices to make their videos appeal to a younger generation of activists that had rejected the dour attitudes that had plagued some branches of the older New Left. Although spectacle-based video was already being used by activist groups like Greenpeace a decade earlier, the sudden availability of relatively inexpensive consumer-grade video cameras during the 1980s provided an unprecedented level of access for many people. Therefore, market conditions in part allowed for the blossoming of a new form of popular direct-action video activism to arise in Manhattan that already held a disproportionate share of media talent and expertise within its reach.

Furthermore, the development of activist satellite broadcasting by Deep Dish Television provided an important development for all video activism in relating local issues nationally and fostering national connections among video activists, cable access providers, and activist groups that were not necessarily media savvy. Not only did DDTV allow for AIDS video activism to achieve national distribution, but satellite broadcasting provided a new model of distribution and video activist organizing that would culminate in the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999, as we will see in the next chapter. Therefore, I will briefly explore how the creation of the *Gulf Crisis TV Project* by PTTV and DDTV in 1990 to protest the first Iraq war became an important precedent in this new form of production and distribution.

This chapter is also concerned with connecting AIDS video activism with wider activist media practices that weren't simply about distributing their messages, but more importantly about empowering those living with AIDS to take control over their own lives and the meanings associated with them. I explore how video activism tied into other aspects of ACT UP/NY's media relations in organizing actions, engaging activists, and addressing and challenging the inaccuracies of the commercial news.

The first half of the chapter will focus on direct-action AIDS video activism's relation to other organizations like PTTV to explore their mutual relations and influences. It will also focus on how AIDS video activism was integrated into other forms of media activism in order to address and challenge multiple commercial news forms and further mobilize AIDS activists. The second half of the chapter will focus on the development of satellite distribution of activist video by DDTV, like the *Gulf Crisis TV Project*, and how AIDS video activism benefited from such a new infrastructure. The 1980s and 1990s in the United States marks a moment where a more widely accessible, spectacle-based video activism will become a new paradigm for many future forms of direct-action video. Also, the initial desire to distribute video nationally during these decades serves as a harbinger for the eventual global distribution of video made possible by the internet during the late 1990s and 2000s.

A Battle over Bodies and Communication

If we accept Autonomist Marxism's belief that subjectivity itself became a key terrain of struggle as capitalism increasingly infringed upon it, AIDS video activism dramatically highlights the centrality of where bodies converge with the means of communication over such fights. Although earlier forms of struggles like that regarding civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s

and even the 1930s Popular Front in Hollywood understood the importance of using the means of communication in mobilizing activists and relating their message, the nature of the fight qualitatively changed as cheaper video technology and more accessible distribution systems like cable television and video cassette recorders flourished within the United States during the 1970s and 1980s and extended video production to previously unprecedented numbers of people.[3] Although one does not want to overidealize such accessibility by overlooking the class, racial, and gender inequities that still plague it, AIDS video activism reveals a new stage of video activism where the fight over new collective forms of subjectivity takes place.

The battle over video production takes on heightened importance as people's lives hang in the balance depending upon if they are viewed as either "deserving victims" of AIDS or as engaged, informed, fully human beings who deserve respect and assistance. Who controls the media message holds very direct implications for people living with AIDS regarding their survival. AIDS video activism grounds the importance of how new forms of collective subjectivities can arise through media production and spectacle-based events that challenge the hegemony of the state and its homophobic outlook that initially disregarded thousands of gay men's deaths as nothing more than inevitable casualties.

The emergence of ACT UP and AIDS media activism in 1987 highlights a historic moment where bodies and signification intimately intertwined. As Simon Watney wrote at the time, "Fighting AIDS is not just a medical struggle, it involves our understanding of the words and images which load the virus down with such a dismal cargo of appalling connotations."[4] Such connotations included "othering" gays by initially associating AIDS solely with them, attributing guilt to gays and minorities who contracted AIDS, and treating those living with AIDS as passive victims and assuming their deaths as inevitable.

The war of signification that AIDS activists engaged in was not just some abstract enterprise, but in part determined the life or death of those living with AIDS. It draws to the forefront the importance of the struggle over new collective subjectivities that Autonomist Marxists stress. For many AIDS activists, addressing the delays of a cure led to systemic critiques of racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic practices that underlie the lack of access to health care, the failure of schools to adequately teach safe sex, and the disproportionate numbers of African-Americans and Hispanics who contracted AIDS.

This resistance identifies an important moment where alternative video thrived while other independent forms of communication were being gutted within the United States during the Reagan-Bush era. As Autonomist Marxists have noted, communication industries provide a crucial role in establishing subjectivities that are compliant with the practices and ideologies of neoliberalism and a heteronormative, white, middle-class existence.

Reagan's assault upon the arts during the 1980s provides one of the most blatant examples of the way in which the state attempted to silence alternative viewpoints that challenged its hegemony. As Patricia Zimmerman notes, Reagan began in 1981 "to eliminate public support for culture by defunding [arts] endowments by 50 percent and decentralizing all federal funding to the states."[5] She emphasizes the political implications underlying such cuts that were there to bolster "the fantasies of the white nation composed entirely of obedient white families."[6] Conservatives mustered accusations of cultural elitism and "arts welfare" for any federal and state support of the arts that diverged from a straight, white, middle-class outlook.

While the arts were being eviscerated, corporate media consolidation took place on an unprecedented level. Antitrust enforcement lightened, making laws already on the books, like the Paramount Decrees, which limited vertical integration of the film industry, all but ineffectual. Deregulation continued at a rapid pace allowing for a series of multinational mergers to occur in rapid succession: General Electric-NBC in 1985, Time-Warner in 1989, Paramount-Viacom in 1993, and ABC-Disney in 1996. This frenzy toward corporate consolidation became enshrined in the 1996 Telecom Act that finally allowed cable and broadcasting companies to merge, eliminated limitations on corporations owning more than twelve broadcasting stations, and encouraged the integration of cable and telecom industries while extending the length of station license renewals from three years to eight, therefore making community oversight more difficult.[7]

Also accompanying the conservative backlash against progressive cultural content was an increase of censorship. David Loxton, founder of TV Lab, was already having to deal with the threat of censorship at WNET in the late 1970s. When attempting to broadcast *Paul Jacobs and the Nuclear Gang* (1980), Loxton had to placate several senior members at WNET that the show's passionate critique of nuclear testing was a benefit instead of a hindrance.[8]

During the 1980s, a growing chorus of conservatives would lob the accusation of a lack of objectivity at various PBS documentaries throughout the decade culminating, as we will see, in controversies revolving around gay and AIDS videos *Tongues Untied* (1989) and *Stop the Church* (1991) and the congressional defunding of queer artists like Robert Mapplethorpe and David Wojnarowicz in 1989.

The 1980s in the United States dramatically revealed the war of signification that Autonomist Marxists highlight, by highlighting how federal and state institutions became engrossed in the fights over arts funding, media consolidation, and federal oversight over the communications industries. AIDS video activism, as a result, had immense challenges in getting its views distributed to counter condescending and often homophobic accounts of those living with AIDS as access to the public airwaves tightened. Yet their location within New York City assisted them greatly in providing institutional support, personal connections, and media savvy in gaining access to commercial media, while also establishing a strong independent media presence through the alternative press, video scene, and public access.

Institutional Support in New York City

Many of those who would become central in AIDS video activism and belonged to video collectives like Testing the Limits (TTL) and DIVA TV were first a part of the Whitney Independent Study Program. The program began in 1968 and had space for fifteen participants each year. It trained its participants in cultural theory, often Marxist and/or poststructural in approach, as well as provided studio space for its practicing artists. The program served as a magnet to the city for many people who came from out of town like Jason Smith or out of the country like Canadians Sandra Elgear and Robyn Hutt. Other participants were Alexandra Juhasz, Greg Bordowitz, Catherine Saalfield, Tom Kalin, and David Meieran, all of whom would become important AIDS video activists.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, its participants were all either middle- or upper-class. The program provided a unique opportunity where advanced theory and praxis was fostered and became an incubator for later AIDS-related work. For example, many of the future members who would form the AIDS video group Testing the Limit started collaborating a year beforehand on other projects. David Meieran enlisted the help of Sandra Elgear and Robyn Hutt with one of his projects while at the Whitney. Through

Meieran, Elgear and Hutt were introduced to Greg Bordowitz, eventually a central figure of the AIDS video activist scene as well as a highly respected member of ACT UP/NY. Elgear assisted both Bordowitz and Meieran to apply for grants.[9]

Additionally, video activists Alexandra Juhasz, Greg Bordowitz, Jean Carlomusto, and Robyn Hutt had all been students at New York University and had been influenced by Faye Ginsburg, a professor of anthropology who was interested in the use of media by indigenous groups. Ginsburg became an important figure for many of them in exploring ethical and collaborative ways of using video in their own AIDS-related activist work.

Such connections and training provided incredible resources for those who would engage in AIDS video activism and further bolstered the cultural and economic privileges that they had already possessed. Video-making, however, was not central at the Whitney Program, so its participants who possessed no training had to turn elsewhere. Paper Tiger Television became an incredibly important training ground.

Paper Tiger Television (PTTV) was launched in 1981 as *Communications Update*. It supplied an important model in quick and economical media production that centered on critical analysis of commercial media, countering it with underrepresented, alternative viewpoints. Its format consisted of weekly "reading" series where a professor, activist, or likeminded host interrogated the imagery and words of a specific commercial media item. Such an approach was central for AIDS activists who similarly unpacked and critiqued the commercial news discourse surrounding the AIDS crisis. As DeeDee Halleck, one of the founders of PTTV, writes, "A good critical reading can invert the media so that they work against themselves."[10]

PTTV's rough aesthetic also encouraged other AIDS activists to engage in their own video production. This, in fact, was one of the intended purposes of PTTV. As Halleck writes, "If there is a specific look for the series, it is handmade, a comfortable nontechnocratic look that says friendly and low budget. The seams show: we often use overview wide-angle shots to give the viewers a sense of the people who are making the show and the types of consumer-grade equipment we use."[11] Elsewhere she continues, "By showing the seams and the price tags, we hope to demystify the process of live television and to prove that making programs isn't all that prohibitively expensive."[12]

For example, PTTV's "reading" series was shot on only two cameras. One followed the host whereas as second camera either covered a related

activity or shot in a wide frame to reveal the mechanics of behind-the-scenes activity like giving guests cues and cameras framing shots. In *Herb Schiller Reads the New York Times* (1981) one camera steadily focuses on Schiller critiquing each section of the Sunday *New York Times* point by point. The second camera either follows the activities of a woman reading the *Times* against a cardboard backdrop of a subway car or reveals the other studio camera filming Schiller.

The handmade set and title cards further accent the do-it-yourself ethos that PTTV advocated. The show provided direct media analysis in ordinary language within an intimate and "homey" environment that contrasted against the slick productions of network television that often obscured and misinformed the general public about whatever issues were being discussed. In *Herb Schiller Reads the New York Times*, PTTV's economic and straightforward style opposed the "712 pages of waste" of the Sunday *Times* that Schiller critiqued.

Some of the central figures in ACT UP video activism, such as Jean Carlomusto, Greg Bordowitz, Catherine Saalfield, Adriene Jenik, and Ray Navarro, had known Halleck earlier, either as their professor or from the NYC activist media scene. PTTV evidenced its anarchist affinities through its nonhierarchical structure and consensus decision-making. Such a nonhierarchical working situation became attractive to ACT UP media activists like Catherine Saalfield, Ellen Spiro, and others who worked with PTTV. During the 1980s, anyone attending their first-time taping of a PTTV show might be asked to contribute by working a camera, the switcher, lights, or making props. The collective would meet for a half-hour at a coffee shop to plan and then run to the studio to set up for taping.

The importance of a consensus-based structure was explicitly referenced in Paper Tiger working documents. An introductory document for new members begins with the rather lengthy explanation of collectivism and consensus decision-making:

> What does it mean for PTTV to be a "collective?" A collective is a group of people operating within a loosely-defined structure to achieve a common goal. The advantage of minimal structure is that it is easier for members to participate in all aspects of the organization. In the case of Paper Tiger, this means that responsibilities within the group change from show to show and from project to project; the director of one show may be the editor on another and the coordinator of one project may be an assistant on another. Likewise, all members can participate in the decision-making process of the group and suggest new projects and initiatives. The lack of rigid organization, however, necessitates that all members have an understanding of the organization's goals and that the organization itself constantly engage in an evaluation of its purpose and practice. A collective may not always function as efficiently as an organization with strict hierarchical structures, but what it lacks in efficiency it makes up for by valuing the opinions and ideas of all of its members.[13]

Elsewhere new members are cautioned, "The best possible scenario is a dynamic and creative group that is constantly informing and critiquing itself evolving as its members push it to new levels of production and reflection."[14]

Although involvement from PTTV members ebbed and flowed, sometimes creating a vibrant and engaged collective and at others relying on a skeletal staff of volunteers that were barely keeping the collective afloat, all the participants interviewed for this study have generally positive accounts regarding its collective structure. Adriene Jenik recalls that once members performed their own tasks, such as camera setup, they assisted others in their tasks, since they only had a half hour for preparation before broadcast. "The skills-sharing," she emphasizes, "was very important and an organic and key part of Paper Tiger training generations of people who wouldn't have had video training. I learned lighting, switching with real professionals, not in class."[15] Dan Marcus, who would eventually become office coordinator at Paper Tiger, recalls having very little technical skill at first. He began by holding cue cards, then worked sound, and eventually produced a few shows.[16]

PTTV's quick production process and accessible style resonated with the needs of AIDS activism for an urgent form of direct-action, spectacle-based events to protest government policy and counter negative public perceptions of those living with AIDS in order to find an expedient cure. Furthermore, it complimented ACT UP's own mission of challenging experts' ill-informed opinions and news anchors' problematic homophobic framing of the AIDS crisis by insisting that people living with AIDS could make their own media, tell their own stories, and provide their own analysis regarding the crisis.

Outreach was an explicit goal of Paper Tiger that is highlighted in one of its working documents:

> Paper Tiger's commitment to democratizing the media extends to more than just the production of shows. Outreach activities such as supporting other organizations and groups with similar political interests, conducting workshops with community groups on the production of low-budget television, participating in conferences and panels on communications issues, and lobbying for better Public Access facilities in the New York area are major concerns of the collective.[17]

This attitude translated into material support when AIDS video activist groups like TTL and DIVA TV formed respectively in 1987 and 1989. PTTV provided cameras, personnel, editing facilities, and the like for AIDS media activists. Adriene Jenik, a member of both DIVA TV and PTTV, confirms the cross-pollination between the two groups: "Several people who had been in the PTTV collective overlapped with us [DIVA TV]. Ellen Spiro was one of the main people. . . . A bunch of PTTV people were on call for Testing the Limits for shooting ACT UP actions. Catherine Saalfield and myself were trained on cameras at PTTV and would then teach people in ACT UP how to use the cameras."[18] Dan Marcus also notes that "if they [DIVA] needed extra camera people, we would help out. We would often run into each other. We were going to ACT UP demonstrations."[19]

DeeDee Halleck, one of the founders of PTTV, recalls how Jean Carlomusto had been one of her students at Long Island University. Through Halleck's encouragement, Carlomusto founded the public access show *The Living with AIDS Show* for Gay Men's Health Crisis.[20] Additionally, Catherine Saalfield, Greg Bordowitz, and Ray Navarro had all worked at PTTV productions at one time or another. Halleck notes, "A lot of the people at Paper Tiger were in ACT UP and went to meetings regularly . . . and there certainly was a lot of exchange and equipment sharing and editing sharing [going on between both groups]."[21] Many of the nonhierarchical practices learned at PTTV and ACT UP would prove influential in the structuring of the early AIDS activists video collectives.

Consensus Decision-Making in ACT UP/NY

Early AIDS activist video groups like Testing the Limits and DIVA TV adopted anarchist-inflected practices learned from both Paper Tiger and ACT UP. Particularly important was the civil disobedience training provided by ACT UP for the October 11, 1987, Gay and Lesbian Second March on Washington, DC. The War Resisters League held a six-hour training session that covered the history of civil disobedience, nonviolence actions, media relations, legal support, and the like. Max Frisch, a Quaker, helped organize some of these trainings.[22]

Much of the training included literature explaining consensus decision-making. It stressed that such decision-making did not mean that everyone always had to agree about the issues, but instead "to assure others of their right to speak and be heard. Coercion and trade-offs are replaced with creative alternatives and compromise with synthesis."[23]

The training also modeled consensus decision-making during an action, which sometimes occurred among ACT UP affinity groups. Although the training cautioned that consensus is a time-consuming process and most decisions should be made prior to an action, if the need arises during an action for consensus, a facilitator should have been selected ahead of time.[24]

Every ACT UP meeting opened with the statement "ACT UP is a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis." Although it might not have often lived-up to its nonpartisan aspirations or have been as welcoming to diverse peoples as possible, its intent to do so signaled an important goal. Internal debates regarding the immediate need to get drugs into white, male, middle-class bodies and a more systemic understanding of how a disproportionate number of the poor and people of color contracted AIDS and lacked basic medical and financial support often arose during ACT UP Monday night meetings. Prioritizing goals always suggests an implicit hierarchy. One can rightfully critique the inability of those who refused to adequately self-critique such practices and explore their limitations. But the nonpartisan aspiration remains important for those who had grown tired with the undemocratic processes of some other Left organizations that they belonged to in the past or still currently attended.

As Ann Cvetkovich observes, many ACT UP members held ties to civil rights, antiwar, and feminist movements. ACT UP, therefore, "provided an important respite from fractures within [those] political communities."[25]

As one past member emphasizes, "It was not a top-down group, it was a bottom-up group, even though there were hierarchies within ACT UP about who was cool and who got to cruise who and who go to do what. It was still a very democratic group."[26] Perhaps most notably, AIDS activism and ACT UP in particular fostered alliances between lesbians and gay men that had fractured during the 1970s.[27] In spite of certain inequities and privileges remaining among its members, which will be addressed more fully later, ACT UP nonetheless offered a more open political space than some of its members had experienced elsewhere.

The video groups' adoption of anarchist tendencies also spoke to their rejection of a commercial news model that demonized people living with AIDS, promoted homophobia, and reinforced a hierarchy of professionals in the media industry who routinely dismissed the insights of those living with AIDS. Greg Bordowitz observes, "Both collectives [Testing the Limits and DIVA TV] use democratic forms, such as consensus decision-making. The goals of both collectives are to quickly produce tapes that can be used by AIDS-activist direct-action groups as organizing tools."[28] DIVA member Peter Bowen states, "Rather than having a fixed membership, a bank account, a solid identity, DIVA floats freely, making tapes with the money, technical resources and labor that is available at any one meeting."[29] Anyone with either the skills or simple hunger to videotape could contribute to the collectives. Furthermore, this open structure not only provided for an influx of immediate assistance in creating and distributing ACT UP videos at the beginning, but it also gave meaning to people's lives when the gay and lesbian community was being decimated with no end in sight.

Nonhierarchical decision-making and direct action took on particular importance for those living with AIDS and the gay and lesbian community as a whole, which was initially being ignored by commercial media and then demonized by them. Affinity groups became a central structure for ACT UP/NY. Although the entire group met on Monday nights, various affinity groups like the Media Committee, the Treatment and Data Committee, the Women's Caucus, and DIVA TV met weekly on other nights. The number of participants in the groups was normally small, with anywhere from five to fifteen people in attendance. The affinity groups allowed its members to not only hone their focus on specific issues/concerns, but provided intimate connections among members who shared similar interests. They allowed for personal bonds to develop and prevented people from becoming lost in an organization as large as ACT UP, which could have one to two hundred people in attendance during a Monday night meeting.

Also, the affinity groups allowed for semi-autonomy from the general body of ACT UP. Although final approval for affinity group decisions had to be vetted during Monday night meetings, the initial impetus began mostly during the affinity group meetings. As Greg Bordowitz notes, the affinity groups allowed "people with AIDS to be in control of all decisions concerning our health. It was very significant and it's very consistent with the history of civil rights movements. Primarily, the core principle is self-determination."[30]

The importance of consensus and affinity groups became particularly stressed during the early 1990s when ACT UP/NY began to fray under the demands of its rather large and unwieldy membership. One participant writes to the group, "ACT UP's greatest strength is the way it has transformed many of us from powerless victims fearing, awaiting or watching our own and our loved ones' deaths into powerful activists who together have changed and continue to change the course of the AIDS epidemic."[31] Although he admits that "the consensus process can easily be fucked up by just a single ego-tripping individual," more proper facilitation and the rotation of coordinating committee members might allow for more free and easy discussion to occur.

The Formation of Testing the Limits and DIVA TV

The formation of AIDS activist video groups emerged spontaneously from the need to tape demonstrations. Testing the Limits (TTL) formed as Greg Bordowitz and David Meieran met while taping a 1987 ACT UP demonstration on Wall Street. Sandra Elgear, Robyn Hutt, Hilery Joy Kipnis, and Jean Carlomusto soon joined. According to Hutt, the collective wasn't formalized until it started to produce its first thirty-minute video, *Testing the Limits* (1987).[32] Also, although it assisted ACT UP and all of its members belonged to ACT UP, TTL always remained independent from it.

DIVA TV, on the other hand, was inspired by TTL's work and emerged as a video affinity group within ACT UP. Its initial task was to produce countersurveillance footage for ACT UP to be used to deter police violence against demonstrators during an action or to be marshaled as evidence during trials to expose police misconduct or inaccuracies. Only as an afterthought did the collective begin compiling their footage into larger video projects.