

SONOLOGIA 2016 – Out of Phase

International conference on sound studies in São Paulo, Brazil

22-25 November

<http://www2.eca.usp.br/sonologia/program/>



The Sound of ACT UP! Aids Activism as Sound(e)scape and Sound-Escapade

Katrin Köppert, University of Art and Design Linz/Austria

In the midst of its narrative and reflection on the US-American Aids movement and the related self-organized structures of support, that emerged in San Francisco, the documentary film “We were here” (David Weissman, 2011) transitions radically precisely at the moment when the international direct action advocacy group AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP!) is introduced and visualized on the screen. This turn is not just characterized by the almost iconic representation of “carried images” (Holert 2008) and graphics, that Douglas Crimp denotes as “Demo Graphics” (1990) and Gregg Bordowitz as “Imagevirus” (2010), but also by the sudden introduction of sound emerging from the discreet cascade of piano and strings.

In this talk I would like to present some initial thoughts on the unattended dimension of sound within the visual culture of early and current HIV/Aids activism and ask about the queer-affective potential of sound as well as about its unintended impediments for the mobilization of protest then and now. Sound constitutes an escapade, a willful departure from popularized debates about the western video-art and activism of ACT UP!. By means of this departure I would like to relate transgressive gender and sexual visual politics of ACT UP! (pro adultery/promiscuity/affective relationships and contra monogamy/abstinence/identity-driven relations) to the movement’s willful tones, screams and noises (Sound-Escapade), and also to the disobedience of its silences (Sound-Escape). Based on a selection of activist videos and home videos and referring to their use within current mainstream film productions, I would like to ask what role the soundscape of ACT UP! might have played during the early Aids crisis and plays for the current imagination within diverging cultures of remembrance.