

Publication Written Submission Document

Name Siân Cook
Occupation, Activism, Location, and any personal story of current contribution to the left. Educator/Graphic Designer. HIV/AIDS Design Activist + Archivist. Co-Director, Women's Design + Research Unit. London.
Social Media Handles/Web address (if you want) Instagram: @hivgraphics Twitter: @nostarpro Linktr.ee/nostarpro
Story Title (name of Book, Film, Song, Poem, art, etc.....) New York Crimes (1989)
Personal account of the story related to your cultural object and how/why it inspired you, influenced you, engaged you. (250/400 words) Gran Fury were a small group of creative AIDS activists, associated with ACT UP, who made a big impact in New York in the 80s and 90s. In the early hours of Tuesday 28 th March 1989, activists accessed newspaper dispensers across the city and wrapped copies of that day's New York Times in their own four page cover version, which featured stories relating to the AIDS crisis that the Times were not reporting. The typography and layout of the fake 'New York Crimes' mimicked the Times editorial style exactly, ensuring that their version of the news would be picked up by an unsuspecting public. I'm not sure how I found out about this stunt, but for me it was a revelation that activism could be smart and <i>designed</i> . It was an innovative way to put information directly into the hands of the people, who were not being given the whole story by conventional media. This was a form of activism as intervention that I had not really considered before. In my experience (pre internet or social media) posters might be created for placards at demonstrations, but that was somehow very separate from everyday life.

ACT UP as a movement was able to draw on insider knowledge and expertise from well-educated and middle class members who may not have become activists for any other cause. Some had even been fairly right-wing or worked in traditional capitalist industries, but who then provided the reconnaissance for protests and interventions targeting Wall Street, politicians and Big Pharma.

Gran Fury used *their* professional creative skills in branding, advertising and media to create campaigns about HIV/AIDS that had high production values and used engaging contemporary design... and I realised that I could try to do that too. It empowered me to think that I could contribute something using the skills I already had.

Whilst the fight in the United States was more politically focused around funding and access to healthcare, in the UK there was a real need for information and advice around safer sex and risk reduction presented in a way that people could relate to, especially amongst the communities most affected by HIV. Independent charities and small grass roots organisations were best placed to provide that and I wanted to do what I could as a graphic designer to help.

Reference: <https://www.granfury.org/the-new-york-crimes>

“The New York Crimes”, *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1989-03-28.

<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-53a4-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

