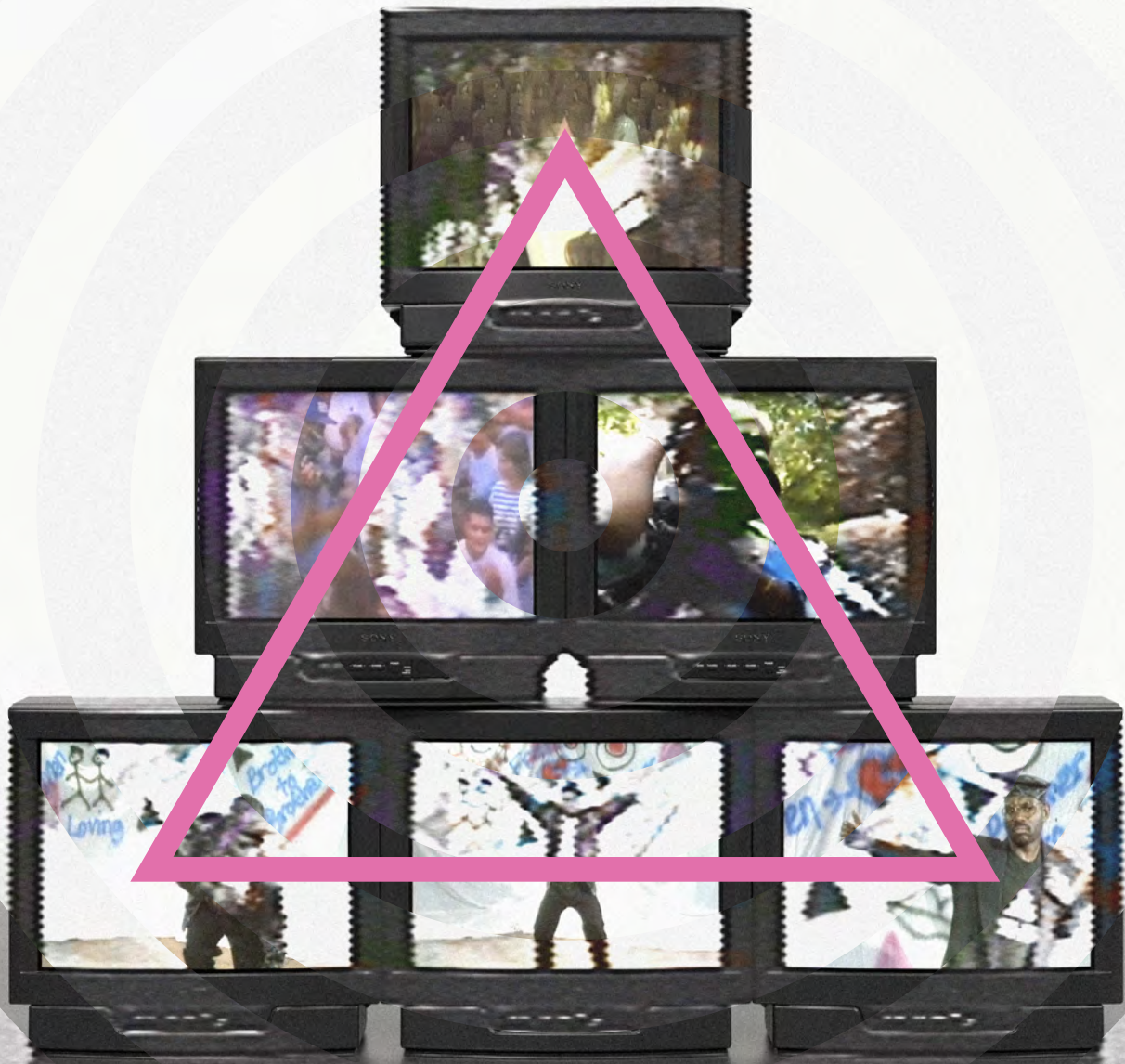


# Retrospectation



## Re-Viewing Media Against AIDS

A collaboration with the LGBTQIA+ Thinking Initiative of the Pembroke Center for Research and Teaching on Women and the Brown Arts IGNITE Series

# Retrospectation: Re-Viewing Media Against AIDS

A film screening of

## Reza Abdoh's *Father Was a Peculiar Man*

preceded by a reception and followed by a panel discussion:  
**Patrick Anderson, Joshua Chambers-Letson,  
Max Johngren, Gwen Pasquarello, Tony Torn**

**February 26, 2024, 5:00 PM**

**Martinos Auditorium, Granoff Center for the Creative Arts**

**Please Note: This film contains graphic violence, overt sexuality, and nudity.  
This film is intended for audiences that are 18+.**



# Welcome

At the height of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, performance and media practices took on a central role in both artistic and activist responses to the pandemic, allowing for direct action, appropriating spaces and technologies, creating new forms of “live” and screened productions, and encouraging modes of spectatorship that were anything but passive. In our recent and current pandemic times, with periods of social isolation with, for many of us, only screen media as our access to others, even as politicians enacted performances of care, media and performance have again taken center stage. As theatre and media scholars living through the COVID-19 pandemic, our thoughts have returned to the hardest years of the AIDS pandemic, an era considered “over” by some even as it continues greatly to impact the lives of those in queer, immunocompromised, poor, Global South, and other minoritized communities. Through the retrospection, speculation, and spectatorship that this project can engender, we will provide perspectives on ways of imaging and imagining, engaging and re-mediating the challenges of living through and with pandemics marked by gender, race, class, and global difference.

Our event is a form of “retrospectation” of performance and media work against AIDS, including a screening of Tony Torn’s film version of *Father is a Peculiar Man*, a 1990 play by Reza Abdoh – a queer, Iranian, experimental theater artist who died of AIDS-related illnesses in 1995 – and an exhibition of artist and activist videos against AIDS (including works by Patricia Benoit, Peter Biella and Frances Negrón, DIVA TV, John Greyson, Barbara Hammer, Scarlot Harlot (Carol Leigh), Isaac Julian, Tom Kalin, Stashu Kybartas, Marlon Riggs, Ellen Spiro, and Youth Against Monsterz).

**We are hopeful that this look backward will help us look forward.**

## **About *Father Was a Peculiar Man* (1990)**

*Father Was a Peculiar Man* (1990) is Reza Abdoh's adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), which combines the Russian classic with meditations on the myth of the American family, the Kennedy legacy, and the destruction of queer men at the height of the AIDS pandemic. Performed in the Meatpacking District of Manhattan, this play's stars included both Abdoh's virtuosic actors and the city itself.

Until recently, this production was only available as 15 hours of raw footage. In the last year, Abdoh company member Tony Torn edited this version of *Father Was a Peculiar Man*, which is now a two-hour film, which employs a split screen, restored sound, subtitles, and an inventive organization that captures the spirit of the original production. Enjoy!

This film has been shown at the Anthology Film Archives in New York City and the Segal Center at CUNY.

An accompanying website that links the film to a map of NYC's Meatpacking District debuts tonight.

This film and the development of the accompanying website in progress was supported by funding from a Brown University OVPR Faculty Seed Fund Grant.

## About Reza Abdoh (1963-1995)

**Reza Abdoh** (1963-1995) was a queer Iranian American avant-garde theatre-maker who died of AIDS-related illnesses at the age of 32. His larger oeuvre included direction of canonical plays (*King Lear*), opera (*Simon Bocanegra*), and global cult classics (*Eva Perón*). He is best known however for his original works, which he wrote and directed, that explored the violences and pleasures of the AIDS-era, which include *Father Was A Peculiar Man* (1990), *Hip Hop Waltz of Eurydice* (1990), *Bogeyman* (1991), *Law of Remains* (1992), *Tight Right White* (1993), and *Quotations from a Ruined City* (1994).

## Film Credits

Film Editor .....	Tony Torn
Sound Design and Restoration .....	Neil Benezra
Subtitles.....	Brett Wachtel
Original Footage.....	Miestorm
Website Developer and Designer .....	Gwen Pasquarello
Website Dramaturg .....	Max Johngren
Dramaturgical Consultants .....	Juliana Francis Kelly
	Tom Fitzpatrick
	Tony Torn
	Brendan Doyle
Special Thanks.....	Brown Arts Institute
	Theatre Arts & Performance Studies
	Pembroke Center Staff
	Alex Nurkin
	Chris Redihan
	Melissa Kievman

## Panelist Biographies

**Patrick Anderson** is a Professor in the departments of Communication, Ethnic Studies, and Critical Gender Studies at the University of California, San Diego, and a 2023 Guggenheim Fellow. He is the author of *Autobiography of a Disease* (Routledge, 2017) and *So Much Wasted* (Duke University Press, 2010) and the co-editor, with Jisha Menon, of *Violence Performed* (Palgrave, 2009). His next book, *The Lamentations: A requiem for queer suicide*, will be released by Fordham University Press in 2024. With Nicholas Ridout, he co-edits the Performance Works book series at Northwestern University Press. He has served as Director of the Critical Gender Studies program and founding facilitator for the Social Justice Practicum at UC San Diego; as Vice President of the American Society for Theatre Research; and as Editorial Board member for the University of California Press. In 2018, he was appointed by the Mayor and City Council of San Diego to the Community Review Board on Police Practices (later the Commission on Police Practices), which represents the community in reviewing complaints against the police, officer-involved shootings, and in-custody deaths. He served for two full terms. A former Fulbright Scholar and Berkeley Fellow, Anderson holds a PhD in Performance Studies (Designated Emphasis: Women, Gender, and Sexuality) from the University of California, Berkeley; an MA in Communication and Cultural Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and a BS in Performance Studies and Anthropology from Northwestern University. In 2020, he completed his Death Doula certification at the University of Vermont.

**Joshua Chambers-Letson** is Professor of Performance Studies and Asian American Studies at Northwestern University. At work on a book about queer love and loss, art, and grief, JCL's most recent monograph, *After the Party: A Manifesto for Queer of Color Life* (NYU Press, 2018) studies contemporary art and performance by queers and women of color who mobilize aesthetics to survive, thrive, and mourn within the annihilating conditions produced by the overlapping forces of racial capitalism, Euro-US colonialism, white supremacy, and cis-heteropatriarchy. Focusing on the lives and work of Nina Simone, Félix González-Torres, Danh Võ, Eiko Otake, and Tseng Kwong Chi, *After the Party* was the 2019 winner of both the Association of Theatre in Higher Education's Outstanding Book Award for best book in theatre and performance studies and the Errol Hill Award for best book in black theatre and performance studies from the American Society for Theatre Research. JCL's first monograph *A Race So Different: Law and Performance in Asian America* (NYU Press, 2014) won the 2014 Outstanding Book Award from ATHE. With Tavia Nyong'o, Chambers-Letson is the co-editor of José Esteban Muñoz's posthumous *The Sense of Brown* (Duke University Press, 2020) and with Christine Mok he is co-editor of Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig's *China Trilogy: Three Parables of Global Capital* (Methuen Drama, 2022).



**Max Johngren** is a playwright, director, and researcher based in New York City. They graduated from Brown University with a degree in Theatre Arts & Performance Studies and have studied at the National Theatre Institute and Boston University. They have produced work with Brown University, the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, and the Old Globe Theater, among others. Their practice takes them to the intersections of arts and technology, where they play amongst code and circuit boards to create hyper-modern reflections on queerness, community, and capitalism. Everywhere Max goes they search for communal spaces where artists and radicals congregate; if they can't find one, they make it.

**Gwen Pasquarello** is a creative technologist, artist, and worker owner with the Emma Technology Cooperative. She has professional installation experience in theme parks, touring entertainment and development experience in a variety of mobile and desktop games. In her practice she aims to explore the ways in which interaction between the audience and the art can create meaning.

**Tony Torn** is an actor and director with over a hundred professional credits in film, television and theater since 1985. Tony is known for working extensively with experimental theater makers Reza Abdoh and Richard Foreman, as the founding director for Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping, playing Rusty Trawler in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* on Broadway opposite Emilia Clark, and creating and starring in *Ubu Sings Ubu with Dan Safer*. He manages Torn Page, a private event space named in honor of his parents Rip Torn and Geraldine Page.

## Curators Biographies

**Patricia Ybarra** (she/her) is Professor in the Department of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies at Brown University. She is the author of *Performing Conquest: Five Centuries of Theatre, History and Identity in Tlaxcala, Mexico* (Michigan, 2009), co-editor with Lara Nielsen of *Neoliberalism and Global Theatres: Performance Permutations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012; paperback 2015), and *Latinx Theatre in Times of Neoliberalism* (Northwestern University Press, 2018). She is currently working on a digital humanities project on Reza Abdoh's *Father Was a Peculiar Man* and a monograph on Abdoh and the development of queer theory. She is the former President of ATHE and the recipient of Brown's graduate mentoring award. She is also this year's chair of the Pembroke Seminar: De-colonial Retrospectation.

**Lynne Joyrich** is Professor of Modern Culture and Media at Brown University and the Director of the LGBTQIA+ Thinking Initiative of the Pembroke Center for Research and Teaching on Women. She is the author of *Re-viewing Reception: Television, Gender, and Postmodern Culture* and of articles on television, film, cultural studies, and feminist and queer studies that have appeared in such journals as *The Black Scholar*, *Critical Inquiry*, *Cinema Journal*, *differences*, *Discourse*, *Jump Cut*, *Journal of e-Media Studies*, and *Journal of Visual Culture*, and such books as *Private Screenings; Modernity and Mass Culture; Logics of Television; Inventing Film Studies; New Media, Old Media; Queer TV*; and *Unwatchable*. She has been a member of the editorial collective of *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* since 1996.

**We invite you to  
visit the exhibition  
of artist/activist  
videos against  
AIDS in the  
Granoff Center  
for the Creative  
Arts, Levels 2-5,  
February 26-March  
2, 2024, 10:00 AM-  
6:00 PM Daily.**

Cover Screenshots From: Peter Biella and Frances Negrón, *AIDS in the Barrio: Eso no me pasa a mí* (1989); Marlon Riggs, *Anthem* (1991); and Ellen Spiro, *DiAna's Hair Ego: AIDS Info Up Front* (1990).



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