

Ferments and the AIDS virus: Interspecies counter-conduct in the history of AIDS

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ABSTRACT ORIGINAL

In the first three decades after AIDS started infecting people in the USA and Canada, before, during and after the emergence of anti-retroviral therapies, numerous "alternative and holistic treatments" for AIDS were debated, tested, circulated, written about and taught. This paper, taking a narrow focus, examines documents that reveal how some people with AIDS developed a logic of care predicated on intimate interactions with microscopic lifeforms-the AIDS virus and the bacteria involved in fermentation, in particular. Focusing on the writings of Jon Greenberg and Sandor Katz, two former members of ACT UP/NY, I show that the men did not just dissent from management by biomedical authority but found new authority about how to care for themselves as people with AIDS from their interactions with non-human microscopic life. The practices and writings of both men demonstrate that Foucault's theory of counter-conduct exists in the history of AIDS as an interspecies process in which microscopic existents lead humans. From Katz and Greenberg, I argue there is an interspecies dimension to counter-conduct that exists as a frame for understanding people who find in non-human life a guide towards unconventional forms of care, revised forms of human behaviour and philosophies for persisting with illness. © Author(s) (or their employer(s)) 2019. No commercial re-use. See rights and permissions. Published by BMJ.