

A Cartography of HIV and AIDS: Archives, Memories, Representations and Narratives

Antonio A. Caballero Gálvez

Universidad Rey Juan Carlos 

Natalia Cocciarini

Universidad Nacional de Rosario 

Raul Anthony Olmedo Neri

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México 

<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/eslg.109927>

Received: 25/05/2026 • Accepted: 25/05/2026

For LGBTIQ+ communities around the world, HIV and AIDS are inseparable and inextricable elements of their historical development, the shaping of their agendas, and the struggles they face in everyday life (Caballero Gálvez, 2019; Cocciarini, 2025; Olmedo Neri, 2026). As Perlongher (1988) noted early on, AIDS also functioned as a technology of moral control over dissident sexualities.

Its significance, however, does not align with the urgent need for its interdisciplinary and longitudinal analysis, for whilst its biomedical framing and social emergence are temporally delimited, its social, cultural, discursive and communicative effects have gone unnoticed in the research agendas of various countries. This has led to a situation characterised by a scarcity of scientific and social research on the multiple impacts that have affected—and continue to affect—those with a serological diagnosis in contexts marked by violence, stigma and neglect.

Thus, the arrival of HIV and AIDS in people's lives, particularly for those who identify as LGBTIQ+, further complicates their reality, as their public and/or medical recognition can, on the one hand, deepen the asymmetrical inequalities they already face in a cisheteronormative society, and, on the other hand, extend these to the margins of stigma and violence confined to the social imagination that has been constructed around HIV and AIDS (Rojas Herra, 2025; García Ramos, 2026).

Against this backdrop, this dossier highlighted the need to revisit HIV and AIDS not only in their recent past, but in the present continuous; drawing on an intersectional perspective, this call for academic contributions encouraged their study from an interdisciplinary approach to draw attention to the tensions generated by their academic discourse in the fields of communication, culture and the arts.

The significance of this thematic focus lies in the fact that the ways in which HIV and AIDS are named and defined in specific contexts not only serve to legitimise stigma through narratives, omissions or representations shaped by power and misinformation, but also enable those who experience it in their daily lives to engage in processes of resistance and re-existence, with the aim of giving voice to their experiences, disseminating counter-narratives and exercising their right to name (themselves). Thus, the tensions between oppression and emancipation that arise in the interstices of communication, culture and the arts compel us to consider how HIV and AIDS are named, who does so and from what perspective this action is undertaken in the present day.

The outcome of this call for papers was significant: there was considerable international interest in demonstrating the relevance, urgency and timeliness of analysing the socio-cultural and artistic manifestations of HIV and AIDS in specific contexts. The number of submissions exceeded our expectations, highlighting the current interest in addressing these issues from diverse perspectives.

Following a rigorous evaluation process, the dossier comprises 11 articles. Each and every one of them offers enriching approaches to the subject matter, highlighting the persistent tensions involved in naming, imagining and embodying HIV and AIDS.

The order in which these articles appear in this Dossier is not random; they have all been organised along a continuum ranging from Communication in its most traditional sense — particularly in the media — to other cultural expressions and the arts — audiovisual representations such as films and series, musical works, literary texts, artists, exhibitions and works of contemporary art — extending to expressions of memory and first-person experiences drawn from Oral History and Ethnography. Thus, this thematic Dossier serves as a way of acknowledging the interdependence of these registers in terms of what can be addressed, with the aim of observing how their relevance is not only contextual, but also social and temporal.

Specifically, it begins with two studies addressing the print media: in “‘And AIDS, woman, what a thing!’: The first decade of AIDS in the newspapers of Rio Grande do Norte (Brazil)”, Manoel Noegueira, Magda Diniz and Jádier Ferreira analyse the press, highlighting the symbolic and discursive tensions between the medical dimension and the resulting social panic. Meanwhile, in “Living with antiretrovirals? HIV/AIDS, the body,

inequality and gender in the columns of Marta Dillon (Argentina, 1995–2003)”, Memi Martinez has examined this cultural archive of HIV in Argentina by analysing the integration of antiretroviral treatment and challenging the dominant narratives surrounding HIV within the specific Argentine socio-political context.

In the field of audiovisual media, there is Andrea Salinas Soto’s research, ‘AIDS, homosexuality and stigma in democratic Spain: from historical discourse to symbolic representation in *Mejor no hables* (1994)’, in which the film serves as a vehicle to highlight the role of resistance against hegemonic discourses on the disease, specifically as a cultural response to the symbolic construction of AIDS as the “plague of the 20th century” associated with certain marginalised groups. Meanwhile, Miguel Azuaga Pérez, in his text entitled ‘Reconfiguring the bias: women and HIV in audiovisual narratives’, analyses four audiovisual productions in which HIV is shifted onto women, highlighting a rarely discussed sector yet one that experiences specific forms of violence, showing how narratives oscillate between the embodiment of stigma and re-existence through the alternative worlds constructed through activism, highlighting the current tensions surrounding this sector.

Next, Samuel Perea-Díaz presents ‘Ears on HIV/AIDS: the CD as a device for sound activism in Anglo-Saxon music’, which explores artistic practices linked to sound through a musical corpus (albums, singles and soundtracks across various genres) in the specific CD format, in order to investigate how these function as instruments of visibility, mourning and political action.

Daniel Soriano’s article, “Discontinuous Fluids: Resistances and Variations in Desire in the Work of Jesús Martínez Oliva on HIV/AIDS”, presents three pieces by the artist, proposing the disputes over meaning that circulate within them—more centred on desire and distanced from death, mourning, and protest, which consequently makes it a fundamental reference for studies on the visual arts and the HIV crisis in Spain.

In chronological order of the artefacts analysed, we have placed the works relating to literature. In ‘AIDS narrative(s) of promiscuous care. Susan Sontag’s “The Way We Live Now” (1986) revisited’, Marta Martín offers a critical re-evaluation of Sontag’s work(s), demonstrating how this creative approach can give rise to a counter-hegemonic discourse on AIDS that remains relevant today. In parallel, Camila Roccatagliata tackles the blurring of boundaries—of nations, of discursive and literary genders, of disciplines, of passions, of periodisations, of the public and the private—involved in analysing Nestor Perlongher’s prose in ‘HIV-AIDS concheperla: representation of HIV-AIDS, hybridity, thanatography and neo-baroque drift in the essays and epistolary writing of Néstor Perlongher’; problematising the author’s particular rhizomatic deconstructive perspective on the disease, which positions him as a novel and forward-thinking voice within the Argentine literary field (at the very least). In this vein, in “‘Bareback’ Time in Guillaume Dustan and Erick Rémès: Seropositive temporalities, bareback writings and the (queer) re-examination of the ‘twisted’ HIV archives’, Julio Pérez Manzanares draws on the authors’ controversial ‘autopornographic’ literature to explore the complex temporalities implicit within these works, as well as their contexts of production and various moments of their reception. The work’s strong alignment with the proposed theoretical framework enables it to interweave these temporalities with the archives created around the very conception, review and epistemology of the virus.

Towards the end, the works that are temporally closer, though from the same socio-historical perspective, focus on everyday practices and oral empirical references. Thus, in ‘LGBT+ activism in Sinaloa, Mexico: between memory, resistance and visibility – a narrative of pioneering leadership in HIV prevention’, Luis Guadalupe Guerrero Vega reconstructs the process of community organisation that emerged between the 1980s and 1990s, identifying its significance, its power for social transformation, and the configuration of a space of memory-history that today underpins new forms of collective action. In parallel, Esmael Alves and Marcos Antonio Ferreria present “‘Biographical Ruptures’ in the narratives of gay men coexisting with HIV: Disruptions, stigma, and the reinvention of masculinities in Brazil” with the aim of identifying processes of reinvention of their masculinity and their social interaction. Using an ethnographic methodology, this work provides a valuable overview of the relevance of addressing this phenomenon today, which must be considered from an interdisciplinary perspective.

The dossier concludes with the ‘Panorama’ section, featuring two critical reviews that explore how narratives surrounding HIV and AIDS are currently being (re)positioned within the artistic and cultural sphere—and, by extension, the social and political spheres. On the one hand, Antonio A. Caballero Gálvez offers a critical analysis of ‘The Show Must Go On: 35 Years of HIV and AIDS Activism at the ComitéVLC’, the exhibition held at the Centre Cultural La Nau at the University of Valencia, which enables him to place the curatorial strategy, materials and narrative of the exhibition within a framework of affective archiving, self-representation and the politics of care within anti-AIDS activism in Valencia (and far beyond), and, fundamentally, the role of art in the face of contemporary policies of forgetting and depoliticisation regarding HIV and AIDS. And, on the other hand, Pau Cerón Calvente presents ‘Inhabiting Silence: Affective Archive and Memory of HIV in Silencio (2025), by Eduardo Casanova’ to position the Spanish director’s recent miniseries as a cultural device capable of preserving and reconfiguring the affections linked to the history of the epidemic. And finally, as a sort of synthesis of the topics the authors have explored, we include ‘Cultural Memory of HIV between Historical Documents and Artistic Representations: A Case Study’ by Alfonso López Ruiz, as it presents the Australian Response to AIDS Oral History Project, which enables him to analyse how individual narratives of HIV are transformed into collective cultural memory through various artistic mediations.

As can be seen, this Dossier presents a kaleidoscope of themes, subjects of study and analytical perspectives that underscore the relevance of addressing the cultural, media and artistic dimensions of HIV and AIDS in contemporary societies. Materials that have shaped (and continue to shape) collective memory, through which emotions circulate and within which the multifaceted developments of activism can be traced.

We hope that this Dossier will spur further work and approaches to this phenomenon, thereby contributing to its visibility and reinterpretation.

References cited

- Caballero-Gálvez, A. (2019). La sociedad portadora. Experiencias artísticas alrededor del sida en España, Argentina y México. En R. M. Mérida Jiménez (ed.). *De vidas y virus. VIH/sida en las culturas hispánicas* (pp. 151-170). Icaria.
- Cocciarini, N. (2025). *Un archivo sidario. Agencias desde las contracultruas sexuales (Argentina 1985-1994)*. EDULP. <https://n9.cl/f71w97>
- Cvetkovich, A. (2018). *Un archivo de sentimientos. Trauma, sexualidad y culturas públicas lesbianas*. Barcelona: Bellaterra Edicions.
- García-Ramos, F. J. (2026). *VIH y sida en el audiovisual español e iberoamericano: discursos y representaciones tras el cambio de siglo*. Peter Lang.
- Olmedo Neri, R. A. (2026). A Poorly Told Story: Media Representations of LGBTQ+ Populations in Mexico. En F. Vidal-Correa (ed.) *Gender Dynamics in Latin American Media and Communications* (pp. 101-134). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://n9.cl/oq36sq>
- Perlongher, N. (1988). *El fantasma del SIDA*. Puntosur.
- Rojas Herra, L. (2025). Archivo Vihsibles. Cap. 2: Estrategias de economía afectiva entre personas seropositivas en el contexto de persecución estatal, durante la pandemia del VIH-SIDA en San José, Costa Rica de 1986 a 1989. En A. Arévalo (Coord.), *Ciudadanías sexuales visibles en América Latina y el Caribe* (pp. 441-472). CLACSO.