

happens to be gay'. Neither applied to the films in Park City, since they were great precisely because of the ways in which they were gay. Their queerness was no more arbitrary than their aesthetics, no more than their individual preoccupations with interrogating history. The queer present negotiates with the past, knowing full well that the future is at stake.

Like film, video is a harbinger of that future, even more so. Yet Sundance, like most film festivals, showed none. To make a point about the dearth of lesbian work in feature film and to confront the industry with its own exclusions, the Barbed Wire Kisses panel opened with a projected screening of Sadie Benning's video-tape *Jollies* – and brought down the house. With an absolute economy of means, Benning constructed a *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dyke* such as we've never seen before. 'I had a crush. It was 1978, and I was in kindergarten'. The lines are spoken facefront to the camera, black-and-white images floating into the frame alongside the words enlisted to spell out her emotions on screen, associative edits calling settled assumptions into question.

The festival ended, of course. Isaac Julien returned to London to finish *Black and White in Colour*, his documentary on the history of blacks in British television. High-school dropout Sadie Benning left to show her tapes at Princeton, and to make another one, *It Wasn't Love*, that proves she's no fluke. Derek Jarman and Jimmy Somerville were arrested for demonstrating outside parliament. Christopher Münch and Tom Kalin picked up prizes in Berlin. Gregg Araki found himself a distributor. New work kept getting produced: the San Francisco festival found its submissions up by 50 per cent in June. The Queer New Wave has come full circle: the boys and their movies have arrived.

But will lesbians ever get the attention for their work that men get for theirs? Will queers of colour ever get equal time? Or video achieve the status reserved for film? Take, for example, Cheryl Dunye, a young video-maker whose *She Don't Fade* and *Vanilla Sex* put a sharp, satiric spin on black romance and cross-race illusions. Or keep an eye out for Jean Carlomusto's *L is For the Way You Look*, to catch a definitive portrait of dyke fandom and its importance for, uh, subject position.

For one magical Saturday afternoon in Park City, there was a panel that traced a history: Derek Jarman at one end on the eve of his fiftieth birthday, and Sadie Benning at the other, just joining the age of consent. The world had changed enough that both of them could be there, with a host of cohorts in between. All engaged in the beginnings of a new queer historiography, capable of transforming this decade, if only the door stays open long enough. For him, for her, for all of us.

### 3. AIDS AND NEW QUEER CINEMA

Monica B. Pearl

New Queer Cinema is gay independent cinema, made in the midst of the AIDS crisis, that defies cinematic convention. This defiance can take the form of being fragmented, non-narrative, and ahistorical. I follow, roughly, José Arroyo's pronouncement (who follows, roughly, B. Ruby Rich's), in his formative article on AIDS and New Queer Cinema, 'Death, Desire and Identity', that films that constitute new queer cinema 'utilize irony and pastiche, represent fragmented subjectivities, depict a compression of time with sometimes dehistoric results, and . . . are dystopic'.<sup>1</sup> In his analysis of the status and origins of Queer Cinema, he asserts that AIDS gave rise to what we call New Queer Cinema. If, as Arroyo argued, 'AIDS has affected what amounts to an epistemic shift in gay culture', then New Queer Cinema is the result of that shift.<sup>2</sup> Arroyo makes the claim that as gay men '[w]e know different things about ourselves and we know ourselves differently (and part of this change is a questioning of who is "we" and what is the self)'.<sup>3</sup> From this he concludes that 'AIDS is why there is New Queer Cinema and it is what New Queer Cinema is about'.<sup>4</sup>

Arroyo's article concentrates on the films of Gus Van Sant and Derek Jarman. B. Ruby Rich, in a follow-up article to her original pronouncement of New Queer Cinema as a movement, refers to Jarman as 'the godfather of the movement'.<sup>5</sup> I too will focus on a film of Jarman's, a film of his that emerged the same year as Arroyo's essay: *Blue* (Derek Jarman, 1993). It is my contention that New Queer Cinema is AIDS cinema: not only because the films, as I will argue, emerge out of the time of and the preoccupations with AIDS, but because their narratives and also their formal discontinuities and disruptions, are AIDS-related. Like Arroyo in 1993, I want to account for the connection between AIDS and New Queer Cinema, but, now, using an expanded grouping of films, and with particular consideration to the role of AIDS activism. So how did AIDS make movies?

Although New Queer Cinema is not always about the subject of AIDS – indeed, often the films that are included in the designation are not at all overtly about AIDS – it is a form and expression that emerges from the cataclysm of AIDS in the Western world. It is not only in film that AIDS inspired new forms of expression: this was true also in literature, in music, and in other visual arts besides cinema. AIDS disrupted individuals, communities, and the ways that things could be thought of or said or expressed. It was disruptive partly because it caused illness and death, and therefore aggravated loss among small groups of individuals in particular communities, but it was disruptive also because of the kind of illness it was – or, rather, the kind of virus that caused the illness and the way it took hold on the human body. The films that constitute New Queer Cinema represent these many levels of disruption.

The virus – that is, the illness – also, then, disrupted identity, the ways that people could think about themselves. HIV is a retrovirus, which compromises the body's immune system by becoming part of the body that it infects. In this way, when the immune system attempts to fight the foreign infection, it ends up battling the body that harbours it. The body's attempt to save itself is what kills it. In this way, the boundaries of the body in the realm of illness, *this* illness, are no longer so clearly demarcated as they have been in the past – partly because the metaphors for what the immune system does are no longer applicable.<sup>6</sup> That narrative no longer works: the story of self versus foreign object does not apply. The self as whole, sacrosanct, inviolable, and definable became, even for those who were not ill, an illusion of self and subjectivity that could not be sustained.

Much of AIDS representation follows the course of the virus itself – or what the virus is perceived to be doing, according to scientific narratives and metaphors.<sup>7</sup> A retrovirus does not follow the ‘traditional’ trajectory of infection, whereby a foreign substance infects the body and is ‘conquered’ by an army of antibodies,<sup>8</sup> rather it insidiously convinces the body that its very being is the foreign substance, and so the body fights itself. HIV, as a retrovirus, is a postmodern virus. It makes the body unable to differentiate between itself and what is external, or foreign, to itself. It takes the virus in like a friend, and then battles with itself. The lack of coherent narrative, or genre recognition, or familiarly fulfilled cinematic expectations in New Queer Cinema, is partly a representational, or ‘artistic’, reaction to the nature of retroviral behaviour. In other words, representation mimics the ‘narrative’ of the virus.

But AIDS was disruptive in a far less narrative, more material, way. It disrupted communities because people became very ill; people died. But even here the ‘normal’ narrative of illness was disrupted. Although every illness is different, we have come to expect a certain storyline to illness, a progression: one becomes ill, one’s health declines, sometimes there is a period of recovery, and finally there follows either death or a triumphant overcoming of the illness.<sup>9</sup> AIDS does not permit of this normative narrative progression.

New Queer Cinema is a reflection and a recapitulation of these disruptions, and most particularly the disruption of identity. The self could no longer be expressed or thought of in the same way, so the visual media that reflected and constructed that identity had to change too, and had to recapitulate the sense of disorder and chaos that was the experience of people, and communities, living with, and dying from, AIDS. Although the virus associated with AIDS has been thought of as resisting visual representation, it has been represented over and over, but obliquely, at an angle, from perspectives that suggest just how disruptive the virus has been.

It could be said that New Queer Cinema emerged from the AIDS crisis through AIDS activism. The direct action group, ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), mobilised against government and pharmaceutical forces to stem the spread of illness and save the lives of people infected with HIV.<sup>10</sup> ACT UP was committed to the disruption of business as usual in order to end the AIDS crisis. This end to ‘business as usual’ took many forms. Life was different, and life therefore for everyone had to be different. For life to go on as usual only represented a kind of complacency in the face of the loss and suffering experienced by others. Through such machinery as peaceful protest resulting in arrest, demanding and winning meetings with powerful government and industry officials, lowering the prices of much needed antiviral medication, bringing to a standstill (for the first time in history) the New York Stock Exchange (in protest at Burroughs Wellcome’s exorbitant prices for AZT), staging kiss-ins and die-ins, challenging laws that spread the incidence of HIV (such as those prohibiting the distribution of sterile hypodermic equipment to injecting drug users), ACT UP itself mimicked the disruption and unrest brought about by the retroviral HIV. ACT UP was motivated by visual attention: the more media, the more publicity, the better. It was this tool that forced organisations and institutions to change their policies, lower their prices, and open their doors to people living with AIDS. ‘Publicity,’ writes Stanley Aronowitz, ‘is the movement’s crucial strategic weapon, embarrassment its major tactic’.<sup>11</sup> As Arroyo writes: ‘The context of the pandemic has created a demand for representation, both political and artistic at a time when representation in the media increasingly becomes a precondition for political representation’.<sup>12</sup>

One of the many important things that ACT UP, and its subgroups and offshoots, did was to disrupt and challenge the representation of AIDS, and of people living with AIDS, in the mainstream media. It did this by protesting erroneous and misleading and incomplete stories and reports on television news, but it did this also by making its own videos – videos that showed another side to living with AIDS, that aimed to correct the misreportage in the mainstream media, and that provided representation that felt more authentic and accurate to the experience of living with HIV than anything that was theretofore available. A subcommittee of ACT UP/New York, DIVA TV (Damned Interfering Video Activist Television) was dedicated to documenting

ACT UP demonstrations and making alternative AIDS media.<sup>13</sup> AIDS video was first used to document AIDS demonstrations, partly because the police could not be trusted not to fabricate infringements upon the law, when indeed it was more often the law enforcement officials who were breaching acceptable conduct procedures for arrest and crowd containment: videotape was used to record what had actually occurred. This coincided with the formation of other AIDS video collectives, namely the Testing the Limits collective that produced the 1987 video documentary *Testing the Limits*, and then, in 1992, a video that focused specifically on ACT UP, *Voices from the Front*.

AIDS and AIDS activism coincided with new video technology, and the production of alternative AIDS media was made possible by the availability of relatively affordable video equipment. Alexandra Juhasz, in her book, *AIDS TV*, writes that the 'lining up of the new video technologies (the camcorder, satellite, VCR, and relatively low-cost computer editing) with the AIDS crisis, and with theories of postmodern identity politics and multiculturalism is the founding condition upon which alternative AIDS media is built'.<sup>14</sup> She goes on to suggest why the possibility of alternative visual representations of AIDS was so crucial:

The potential of media production for those individuals and communities who never before could afford it or master it occurred just as a social crisis of massive proportions and multiple dimensions begged to be represented in a manner available to the most and the least economically privileged. The politics of AIDS – the demands for better quality of life for the people affected by this epidemic – are well matched by the potentials and politics of video.<sup>15</sup>

Early AIDS video was also meant to fill in the gaps of what government health education authorities might have been consigned to do: educate the 'general population' that the government imagined most needed to know about how to protect themselves and others from HIV infection. These videos also gave a voice, and a public image, to otherwise silenced communities in the AIDS crisis – often the communities at risk that needed the most intervention. These tapes also did more than educate about transmission, but about how to obtain healthcare and other benefits, and how to stand up for one's rights when disenfranchised – through illness or other marginal status.

When Juhasz asks, '[w]hy this form of response instead of or in addition to marching, lobbying, or leafleting?',<sup>16</sup> she affirms the link between video production and activism, indeed, pointing to an early coined amalgam: 'video activism'. Two key New Queer filmmakers, Tom Kalin and John Greyson, started out making activist videos. Kalin was an early member of ACT UP/New York and the activist arts group Gran Fury, and in 1988 produced the video *they are lost to vision altogether*, a video 'heavily inflected by an "ACT UP vocabulary"'.<sup>17</sup>

John Greyson's feature film *Zero Patience* offers an interesting amalgam of AIDS activism, AIDS alternative video documentary, and New Queer Cinema. It is the story of 'Patient Zero', the alleged first person with AIDS who, according to Randy Shilts' book *And the Band Played On*, was responsible for the spread of AIDS in North America and probably beyond.<sup>18</sup> A Canadian flight attendant, Gaetan Dugas, is portrayed in Greyson's film as a ghost who has come back to life to correct this misrepresentation, in this way fictionalising the very tactics of ACT UP: to correct misinformation. Meanwhile, AIDS activism is itself represented in the film when the local AIDS activist group intervene, literally – by breaking into a museum at night – to correct the erroneous assumptions about how AIDS is spread. That *Zero Patience* is a musical only further subverts the ways we might expect to be 'entertained' by such serious matters as AIDS, history, media representation, and the legacy of moralism and sexuality.

AIDS was disruptive as a virus, as an illness. It was sudden and quick, decimating communities. It also disrupted – and, indeed, also coalesced – identities, particularly gay identity. It coalesced identity by making people 'gay' who might not have, or might not needed to have, thought of themselves in that way before. By contracting HIV through sex with another man, or by being interpellated as someone who might require safe sex information based on a history of, or desire for, sexual relations with another man, some men 'became gay' with the advent of the AIDS crisis. AIDS caused shifts in identity.

But most pertinent to this discussion, is the way that what was experienced, since at least the Stonewall riots of 1969, as a fairly known and stable gay identity, was disrupted with the advent of the AIDS crisis. Part of that disruption has to do with the nature of the illness: the chaotic and non-narrative and non-progressive nature of AIDS. Films were needed that represented this disrupted chronology, as it were.

As Sarah Schulman puts it, what appears to be 'experimental' cinema, for a lesbian and gay audience contains 'a far more visceral and accurate presentation of how we really live than the commercial films prepared for a straight audience'.<sup>19</sup> Schulman suggests that 'as gay people have had to interrogate and invent themselves, films that re-imagine the world resonate for us with deep and familiar emotions'.<sup>20</sup>

But it is more complicated than this. AIDS needed representation, partly because it was considered unrepresentable. So, although there are 'AIDS movies', that is, films that deal directly with the difficulties with living with HIV and AIDS, and more generally, loss from AIDS, even independent films that are *about* AIDS, are often *about* AIDS only indirectly. Take the film *Grief* (Richard Glatzer, 1994), for example. The underlying premise and plot of the film is that Mark's lover Kenny died from AIDS a year earlier, and Mark doesn't know his own HIV status. But the film itself is *about* daily life at work on the set of a torrid daytime television programme: romance and sex and jealousy. But of course the details in this film are a distraction from, and an

absorption in, grief. The film is about grief – Mark's grief and perhaps also a more widespread grief among *Grief*'s viewers – but also about daily losses and mourning: job insecurity, romance and desire and inter-office tensions, promotions. But it is precisely the narrative coherence and dailiness of this film that make it not New Queer Cinema.

Although I contend that New Queer Cinema emerges from and is more often than not *about* AIDS, not all New Queer Cinema is overtly about AIDS. And even some of the films that are about AIDS seem sometimes to deflect it rather than to focus on it. *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, 1992) is a good example of a film that is, in many ways, an AIDS film, but what makes it New Queer Cinema is not the ways that it is overtly about AIDS, but the ways that it is preoccupied with death and time and history. There is a character in *The Living End*, Jon, who discovers he is HIV infected, but this is information gained and put aside early in the film. This is a premise of the film, we are told, but not the underpinning of it. There are films that are 'about' AIDS, that are gay, contain gay themes and gay characters – are independently produced – but are not New Queer Cinema. Like *Grief*.

*The Living End* is a film that incorporates HIV into its plotline. Both main characters, Jon and Luke, are HIV positive. But that is only the most obvious way that it betrays a concern with AIDS. The film's preoccupation with death, and control over death, is the less obvious, but more pervasive, 'AIDS-related' theme of the film. The film opens with a piece of graffiti, 'fuck the world', that suggests the film's irreverent pursuit of such questions as to what extent AIDS might – very radically – be freeing. This film boldly suggests that for those marginalised by the world – by sexual identity, but not only by that – the spectre of death makes one more empowered, more free, than one was before one was haunted by that spectre. Jon tells Luke before they have sex for the first time that he has HIV; Luke replies, 'It's no big deal'. The next morning he changes his mind; it is a big deal: but liberating; because as HIV positive they can do 'whatever the fuck we want'. They can embrace life, they can take risks. The film is precisely about the liberation of AIDS.

Derek Jarman's film *Blue* is another example of New Queer Cinema that is about AIDS. It is New Queer Cinema because it is formally 'fragmented' and challenging. *Blue* has no 'body', no cinematic image. *Blue* is asking the viewer to contend with the disorientation of watching a film that has no variation in the visual image. All one watches, for seventy-five minutes, is a blue screen. Jarman made the film when he was going blind from cytomegalovirus, an AIDS-related infection. 'I have to come to terms with sightlessness', he narrates. But in this film he has done away with the image, with the body, the thing that betrays. There is nothing to see; no need for eyes, for vision. Gabriele Griffin writes that

[i]n *Blue* looking and seeing acquire new meanings because the gaze is denied, or rather the desire for the gaze to be met by a visual object is

unexpectedly re-directed. For it is, in fact, not exactly the case that there is nothing to see – what we have is an immense, screen-filling blueness.<sup>21</sup>

*Blue* disrupts visual and narrative expectations. Like *The Living End* (though it is in all other respects *unlike* *The Living End*), *Blue* is a film that is obviously about AIDS, but what makes it an AIDS film is not this overt 'plot line'.

### RESPONSIBILITY

New Queer Cinema is trying to interrogate, rewrite, and reassign responsibility, much like the original activist AIDS videos that aimed to 'correct, augment, or politicize the paltry, timid, and incorrect representations found on broadcast television'.<sup>22</sup> This is not to say that the films are pedantic or pedagogic or didactic. But their narrative trajectory and conclusion – unlike the heterosexual romance that concludes most conventional Hollywood films – often are a reassignment of blame and responsibility.

John Greyson's film *Lilies* (1996) is a film about taking responsibility for death – or, more accurately, about not being irresponsible about where one casts blame. The film's story is about a man, Simon, who serves a life sentence for a murder for which he was not responsible, indeed for the death of the man he loved. It is not hard to read this as an AIDS story, the story of blame wrongly assigned: as gay men are accused of recklessness, of spreading infection. In 1952 Canada, a bishop is called to prison to hear the confession of a dying prisoner. But it turns out that this prisoner, Simon, with the help of his fellow inmates, has prepared to lock the bishop, Bilodeau, in his own confessional, and forced him to watch the reenactment of the 'murder' and the events leading up to it, the crime for which Simon was held responsible and incarcerated. Forty years earlier, as late adolescent boys, Bilodeau looked on jealously as Simon declared his love for Vallier, and it was he who set the fire that led to Vallier's death. It was not Simon who was responsible for the death of his lover. If we want to take Greyson's symbolism specifically, he not only removes blame from the gay lover, but assigns blame to the Catholic Church, for which the bishop can easily be read as the synecdochal stand-in.

What *Lilies* does extraordinarily is convince us that the prisoners are the figures from Simon's past, that they are Simon and Vallier and the Bishop, and that Vallier's mad mother, and Simon's elegant mistress, all played by the male prisoners, are from that past too. It helps a little that cinematically Greyson elides the 'play' within the prison into a film, but we are not convinced by the fact that it is film; we are convinced by the acting. *Lilies* depends on artifice and fantasy. That the men play both the male and female characters, and that the reenactment switches from play within the prison to cinematic flashback, both blur and reinstate the boundaries of what is artifice, what is cinematic, what is 'real'. Narrative and cinematic form is convincing but not reliable. One can see this as well in Christopher Münch's film *The Hours and Times*

(1991). It is a convincing set piece about John Lennon and Brian Epstein on holiday in Spain, but it is hardly historically reliable. Nevertheless, it encourages a reimagining of the past, the creative manipulation of history.

#### TIME

New Queer Cinema attempts not only to reassess responsibility but is trying to counter the devastation of AIDS, often by a narrative effort to control death. The most important feature that marks New Queer Cinema as AIDS related is its films' ahistoric, non-chronological, and even sometimes anachronistic sense of time. Arroyo points to this when he writes that films within the designation New Queer Cinema 'depict a compression of time with sometimes dehistoric results'.<sup>23</sup> This being out of time takes different forms in different films, but what it echoes is the way that AIDS, as a retroviral, chronic, and recurring illness, disrupts the story and progression of illness narrative, whereby one gets ill and dies, or ill and triumphs over death, and also disrupts, quite simply, the progression of life.

*Blue*, with its lack of visual image, is all voiceover, but no story. There is no narrative that unfolds, only endless blue with voices describing or incanting, or music or sound effects playing. The film opens with the sound of bells, as a clock chiming, and returns to these sounds, incorporating near the end a ticking clock. It also includes, in the voiceover, a preoccupation with time, as the narrating figure (who could be taken to be Jarman himself, and which is sometimes actually the voice of Jarman, but is also sometimes the voices of John Quentin, Nigel Terry, and Tilda Swinton), attached to his DHPG drip (the medication meant to stabilise his eyesight), muses, 'the drip ticks out seconds, the source of a stream along which the minutes flow, to join the river of hours and the sea of years in a timeless ocean'. 'The years', the disembodied voice tells us near the end of the film, 'slip off the calendar'.

Set in the past – the mid-twentieth century, and also the turn of the century – *Lilies* is in no obvious way an AIDS film. But *Lilies* is not unlike Greyson's earlier film, *Zero Patience*, in that it plays with time and filmic convention and genre. *Zero Patience* – an AIDS musical and fictitious documentary – resurrects the dead Patient Zero to clear his name. *Lilies* is most like *Zero Patience* in that it rewrites a story – it corrects history, and reassesses responsibility. The bishop in *Lilies* – the man really responsible for Vallier's death forty years earlier – cannot remain blameless; indeed, as the film closes it seems that he might kill himself with the knife Simon has supplied to him.

*Lilies* also plays with filmic convention when it incorporates what we are accustomed to thinking of as a 'flashback', but because the prisoners are acting out the past in 'real time', it is not the past but the filmic present that is on display. It is why (besides the marvellous acting) we are meant to suspend our disbelief about the gender of the roles played. Because it is *not* flashback but asks us to imagine the past, it incorporates past and present into the same

moment – into synchronous time. There is no (filmic) past and present in this film, only one moment, the present.

*Looking for Langston* (Isaac Julien, 1989), another primary example of New Queer Cinema, dehistoricises its narrative. Though it is meant to be the reappraisal of Langston Hughes, African American poet of the Harlem Renaissance, it is a film that, while very stylised and aestheticised, is out of time. The mise en scène displays photographs of Hughes himself and of James Baldwin, non-contemporaries but both important (gay) African American writers. The scene at the end of the film devolves musically into a contemporary dance club, as the music in this refined 1920s' setting, turns to disco. The voiceover blends the poetry of Hughes with that of out gay black poet Essex Hemphill (now deceased, but alive at the time the film was made), and contains versions of Hughes' poetry – a dream deferred – set to music. Finally, as in the case of *Blue*, *Looking for Langston* has no obvious narrative.

Münch's *The Hours and Times* reimagines a four-day holiday in Barcelona taken by John Lennon and Brian Epstein in 1963. Issued in 1991, this black-and-white film invents an anguished homoerotic relationship between the laconic Beatle and his devoted manager. The convincing mise en scène makes the film historically plausible, but still, like Tom Kalin's film *Swoon*, *The Hours and Times* imaginatively narrativises a past as one needs it to have been. It is a way of controlling – not death, as I have asserted among the aims of New Queer Cinema – but history. It is a way of claiming control over time and events, as one might like to give the catastrophic outcome of the AIDS crisis.

#### DEATH

*Swoon* is narratively and historically appropriate, within its terms, and unfolds in 1924, making it not an obvious contender for an AIDS film. However, the film is focused on death, and control over death. Further, it focuses on death as the point around which a gay relationship turns. The film is a retelling of the oft-told story of Leopold and Loeb, two men who in 1924 murdered a young boy for what seemed to be the mere pleasure of it. In Kalin's film, their 'crimes' are meant to glue them together (they exchange rings at the beginning of the film; when Richard Loeb dies, Nathan Leopold slips the band off Loeb's finger and pushes it into Loeb's mouth), they are the pivot, it seems, of their (sexual) relationship, which the murder itself seals: Nathan remarks in a voiceover, a 'diary entry', that 'killing Bobby Franks together would join Richard and I for life'.

*Swoon* also, incidentally, tries to make a narrative out of, and make beautiful, what is thought of as senseless: the historical motiveless murder of a small boy. It tries to make sense of, and aestheticise, senseless death. An AIDS film indeed. While I have said that *Swoon* is historically 'appropriate' to its time, there is the matter of the anachronistic walkmans and pushbutton

phones. It has been suggested that this is a way to make the film more obviously a film of our time.<sup>24</sup> This is right, I think; but it does more than this: it is another way to make the film 'not fit' a timeline. It makes the film unreliable. Like *Lilies* and *The Hours and Times*, *Swoon* is a film that points to the artifice of film, even while it luxuriates in a recognisably noir aesthetic, making it seem known even while it contravenes the convention.

Like *Lilies*, *Swoon* is also a meditation on responsibility. The end of *Swoon* is taken up with the trials and imprisonment of Leopold and Loeb, and while they do not protest their innocence, the two men are throughout unashamed and unapologetic for what they have done. What might seem senseless to the viewer, seems to make sense to them. What does not seem immediately obvious as an AIDS film, becomes more so when the plot suggests the way gay men have had to defend or explain their lives.

Todd Haynes' film *Safe* (1995) is least obviously New Queer Cinema. It has no announced gay characters and focuses on the disaffection of a rich bored California housewife. However, as the housewife, Carol, is increasingly afflicted with environmental illness and menaced by the world around her, it is not difficult to read the film as an AIDS allegory. It is a film about an individual who is vulnerable to infection, who, as the title nearly mocks, cannot be made safe, either sexually or otherwise, and who is shunned by her community.<sup>25</sup> *Safe* is not noticeably unconventional in its narrative unfolding, but it is eccentric in its acceleration of Carol's dis-ease in the world, making it seem normal in the end for her to live in the smallest possible enclosure, safe from the world's ills.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, I would like to comment on a recent film, *The Hours* (Stephen Daldry, 2002). *The Hours* is not New Queer Cinema. Chiefly because it was produced outside of the general timeframe of what has been designated New Queer Cinema; but it carries significant traits of the movement (its title a monomial modified by a gerund). For one thing, its preoccupation – announced in the title – with time. Although the title is the restoration of Virginia Woolf's discarded title for *Mrs Dalloway*, 'The Hours' points most poignantly to the idea of postmodern time – the way that time present emerges out of, but absorbs and carries within it, time past. The narrative of *The Hours* incorporates three separate historical timeframes, showing not a chronological progression, but shifts in the meaning of time, of the hours of a day. AIDS is only one theme among many in this film – and that the 'hero' is dying of AIDS is not exactly incidental, but not the point of the film's present-day episodes – but it underwrites the preciousness of time for the characters. Time, in the parallel episodes in the other timeframes, is speeded up through editing and pacing to emphasise the rush of life. It is the present-day Clarissa who has, in the end, the most to gain – because she does live in the present day – from utilising time, rather than succumbing to it.

## CONCLUSION

In *The Living End*, Luke cuts his wrist, and slumped, shirtless, against Jon's car, he peers into his wound and says, 'I know it's inside me, but I can't see it. Can you?' Gabriele Griffin has called AIDS a 'visually under-determined illness'.<sup>27</sup> Juhasz suggests that AIDS is 'only manageable in representation'.<sup>28</sup> It seems that AIDS – invisible, ungraspable, and, as Judith Williamson has pronounced, 'meaningless' – requires visual representation to make it known, or understood, or manageable. Williamson writes that 'nothing could be more meaningless than a virus. It has no point, no purpose, no plan; it is part of no scheme, carries no inherent significance'.<sup>29</sup> Visual representation can provide a story to a virus that has no natural narrative. This is precisely what John Greyson does with his film *Zero Patience*, the premise of which is the search for a story that will make sense of contagion and death ('tell the story of a virus,' one character sings<sup>30</sup>).

However, New Queer Cinema is less interested in the story – in something that renders the virus coherent – than in something that authentically represents the experience of living with the virus. New Queer Cinema provides another way of making sense out of the virus, that does not placate and does not provide easy answers – that reflects rather than corrects the experience of fragmentation, disruption, unboundaried identity, incoherent narrative, and inconclusive endings. It is a way of providing meaning that does not change or sanitise the experience.

In many ways the 'opposite' of New Queer Cinema is mainstream cinema: mainstream film is generally not challenging, not defiant, and not reflective of the shifts in personal identity wrought by AIDS. *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993) is the obvious example. But another 'opposite' of New Queer Cinema is a kind of 'realist' gay AIDS independent cinema, epitomised by the documentary *Silverlake Life: The View from Here* (Peter Friedman, Tom Joslin, Jane Weiner, and Doug Block, 1993). *Silverlake Life*, contemporaneous with many examples of New Queer Cinema, is not New Queer Cinema, even though it also emerges out of the AIDS crisis and the need for authentic visual representation.

Although the film *Silverlake Life* does not employ deliberate techniques of innovative idiosyncratic filmmaking, but records from life, 'life' can be idiosyncratic indeed. *Silverlake Life* has much in common with grassroots AIDS activist video production, in that it is low budget and records what it sees in real time. As a 'video diary', *Silverlake Life* records the lives and deaths of Tom Joslin and Mark Massi. It is quotidian in the extreme, as we are subjected to holiday visits home to family, hospital visits, shopping mall visits, meals being prepared and eaten, medication swallowed. What makes the film 'dramatic', is that in the course of this dailiness, Tom, and then Mark, deteriorate and die. Peggy Phelan calls the film a 'thanatography, a study in dying'.<sup>31</sup>

There are gaps in the video diary when Tom is too ill or dejected to film. The camera shakes when Mark is crying, filming Tom moments after Tom has died. The chronology is out of order when Tom is referred to at the beginning of the video in the past tense and then depicted alive and narrating. All these techniques might be associated with what I have argued is AIDS-inspired New Queer Cinema. Perhaps this opposition is what best proves the point of what New Queer Cinema is doing, and how it emerges out of the disruptions caused by AIDS. *Silverlake Life* is edited and pasted together: two hours of film from forty hours of footage; we are not, obviously, seeing the events in real time, but nevertheless it is as 'real' as film gets. That this video diary and New Queer Cinema have more in common than either does, for example, with mainstream cinema suggests the success of the project of New Queer Cinema, that the techniques of New Queer Cinema, though perhaps seemingly random or stylised for their own sake, are what manage best to capture the exigency and urgency and dailiness and drama of AIDS and its catastrophic disruptions – disruptions to narrative and to life as we have known them.

## NOTES

- 1 José Arroyo, 'Death, Desire and Identity: The Political Unconscious of "New Queer Cinema"', in Joseph Bristow and Angelia R. Wilson (eds), *Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), p. 90.
- 2 Ibid., p. 92.
- 3 Ibid., p. 92.
- 4 Ibid., p. 92.
- 5 B. Ruby Rich, 'Queer and Present Danger', *Sight and Sound*, March 2000, as visited at [http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/2000\\_03/queer.html](http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/2000_03/queer.html), accessed 23 June 2003.
- 6 For a discussion of these metaphors see Emily Martin, *Flexible Bodies: The Role of Immunity in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).
- 7 For a scientific explanation of how HIV acts in the body see, for example, Edward King, Peter Scott, and Peter Aggleton, 'HIV and AIDS', in Peter Aggleton, Kim Rivers, Ian Warwick, and Geoff Whitty (eds), *Learning About AIDS: Scientific and Social Issues*, 2nd edition (London: Churchill Livingstone, 1994), pp. 21–3.
- 8 See Martin, *Flexible*.
- 9 See Jackie Stacey, *Teratologies: A Cultural Study of Cancer* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) for an interrogation of narrative expectations of illness.
- 10 ACT UP was formed in 1987 when Larry Kramer, addressing a group attending a monthly speaker's series at the New York Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center incited the group to fury and fear.
- 11 Stanley Aronowitz, 'Against the Liberal State: ACT-UP and the Emergence of Postmodern Politics', in Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman (eds), *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 364.
- 12 Arroyo, 'Death', p. 92.
- 13 ACT UP's visual imagery was not limited to the moving image; the demographics of the ACT UP subgroup Gran Fury, which included the now iconic Silence=Death image, featuring a bright pink inverted triangle against a black background, became the key images by which AIDS activism was recognized (see Douglas Crimp with Adam Rolston, *AIDS Demo/Graphics* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1990) for an account of this image and many others that originated with ACT-UP). However, it was 'guerrilla video' that provides the trail from AIDS and AIDS activism to New Queer Cinema.
- 14 Alexandra Juhasz, *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 2.
- 15 Ibid., p. 2.
- 16 Ibid., p. 2.
- 17 Ibid., p. 59. See Juhasz for more on the early activist work of Kalin and Greyson.
- 18 Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin's, 1987).
- 19 Sarah Schulman, 'Fame, Shame, and Kaposi's Sarcoma: New Themes in Lesbian and Gay Film', *My American History: Lesbian and Gay Life During the Reagan/Bush Years* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 228.
- 20 Ibid., p. 228.
- 21 Gabriele Griffin, *Representations of HIV and AIDS: Visibility Blue/s* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 14.
- 22 Juhasz, *AIDS TV*, p. 31.
- 23 Arroyo, 'Death', p. 90.
- 24 For example, see the review at [www.tvguide.com/movies/database/showmovie.asp?MI=35364](http://www.tvguide.com/movies/database/showmovie.asp?MI=35364), accessed 30 June 2003.
- 25 One is struck by the monomial titles of much New Queer Cinema: *Lilies*, *Swoon*, *Safe*, *Blue*, even *Poison* and *Grief*. None of them is called *AIDS*, but I think the persistent monomial manifestly suggests, and avoids, that very title.
- 26 Haynes comments that it is exactly how closely *Safe* approximates but doesn't achieve filmic convention that makes it so disturbing: 'the film creates expectations for a more linear, accessible type of film that it doesn't fulfill', quoted in an interview with Larry Gross in *Filmmaker* 3:4 (Summer 1995) as found at <http://home.comcast.net/~rogerdeforest/haynes/text/haynint1.htm>, accessed 30 June 2003.
- 27 Griffin, *Representations*, p. 17.
- 28 Juhasz, *AIDS TV*, p. 3, emphasis in original.
- 29 Judith Williamson, 'Every Virus Tells a Story: The Meanings of HIV and AIDS', in Erica Carter and Simon Watney (eds), *Taking Liberties: AIDS and Cultural Politics* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1989), p. 69.
- 30 See Monica B. Pearl, 'Zero Patience: AIDS, Music, and Reincarnation Films', in Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell (eds), *Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond* (Exeter: Intellect Press, 1999) for more on John Greyson's film.
- 31 Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 154.