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THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF *DIS*-EASE: DIFFERENCE AND/AS DISPLACEMENT IN POPULAR DISCOURSES OF THE AIDS CRISIS

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I would first and foremost like to extend my considerable respect, gratitude and appreciation to my friend and advisor, Professor Berkeley Kaite, who continually and unequivocally went beyond the "call of duty" in both her professional and personal commitments to me and my work, and who provided the fertile ground upon which to cultivate the issues and concerns that were of importance to me. I would also like to thank retrospectively Professor Brenda Carr, with whom I became friends as an undergraduate. Though we have since parted ways, her commitment to the pursuit of knowledge from both the head *and* the heart opened up for me new ways of knowing, a commitment that made my decision to be an academic bearable, and that, I hope, remains with me to this day.

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This thesis investigates the cultural and social production of AIDS in popular discourse, particularly film and mass media, and offers a critical consideration of the ways in which the proliferation and dispersion of these discourses function in our current episteme to rearticulate and reinscribe traditional value systems of sexuality, familialism, and nationalism. Taking the lead of the work of Michel Foucault on the body in various historical regimes, the author here will posit a theoretical analysis of the "discursive formation" of AIDS, how the body of AIDS is *put into discourse*, to provide a matrix for establishing the various disciplinary and regulatory apparatuses structuring the epidemic--that is, the affirmation of certain kinds of pleasures and bodies and the strategic circumvention of *other* pleasures and bodies. Under what the author refers to as the cultural logic of *dis*-ease, the investigations that follow will be animated by the central question: Whose pleasure and/or power is served by these representations and discourses of the body of AIDS in popular cultural practices?

Cette thèse analyse la représéntation socioculturelle du SIDA à l'intérieur du discours populaire, particulièrement dans les films et les médias de masse. Elle offre une interprétation critique des voies par lesquelles la dispertion de ces discours fonctionne dans notre actuel episteme qui en fait servent à renforcer le systéme de valeurs traditionnelles concernant la sexualitié, la famille et la nationalisme. Ainsi, à partir des écrits de Michel Foucault sur le corps humain dans plusieurs cadres historiques, l'auteur fournira une analyse théorique de la formation discursive du SIDA; de la façon par laquelle le corps atteint est inclu dans le discours. Ceci dans le but de présenter une matrice qui illustre les divers mécanismes coercitifs et punitifs qui entourent l'épidémie qui est, l'affirmation de certains types de plaisirs corporels et l'évitement stratégique des autres plaisirs corporels. Ce à quoi l'auteur réferera comme étant "the cultural logic of *dis*-ease." Les différentes analyses qui suivent seront animées par cette question centrale: Qui soutire du pouvoir et/ou du plaisir de ces représentations et discours du SIDA dans la practique de la culture populaire?

INTRODUCTION:

DIFFERENCE, DISPLACEMENT, AND THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF *DIS*-EASE IN POPULAR AIDS DISCOURSE

Since the historical emergence of AIDS nearly two decades ago, much ink and paper has been devoted to an analysis of the discursive and proliferating representational economy of the epidemic and of the political and ideological structures that facilitate the utterance of its discourse. The volatile and highly charged emotional and political nature of the AIDS crisis, its proximity to those always already stigmatized social fields through which AIDS has been structured since the very beginning of its emergence, and the uncertainty of its progression and longevity, has necessitated a critical, in-depth commitment to understanding systems of representation in the hope of teasing out the ways in which--and to what ends--AIDS has been reinserted, redistributed and redispersed into various and multiple preexisting power-knowledge formations. Rather than assuming that AIDS and the social and cultural responses it has elicited represent a unique and coherent "problem" or condition of contemporary life, the principle *modus operandi* of such early and seminal works as Simon Watney's *Policing Desire*, Douglas Crimp's (ed.) *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, or Cindy Patton's *Sex and Germs* and *Inventing AIDS*, has been the repeated insistence that AIDS can and is promoted in cultural discourse in such a way as to insidiously reinscribe and valorize dominant cultural systems of value, while simultaneously serving to further stigmatize those subjectivities and identities that have always already been outside these systems.

As a discourse critic writing about AIDS in 1995, eight years after the publication of *Policing Desire*, and almost fifteen years into the epidemic, I would like to believe that the diversifying demographic landscape of AIDS--the movement of HIV into hitherto unaffected segments of the population--would have ushered in a radical upheaval of these signifying practices in the representational economy of AIDS, and that we might finally be

beyond the necessity of these kinds of discursive analyses and devote our time and energy instead to the prevention of further infection and the care of those who are ill. In some ways, the mutating demographics of AIDS/HIV have indeed effected its discourses and representations. In some ways, we are no longer witness to the blatant prejudice that characterized the early configurations of this disease, the rampant and virulent homophobia that was as threatening to the survival of the gay community as the emergence of this new and uncertain viral infection.

One of the cultural changes ushered in as a result of epidemiological changes is manifested in the recent trend toward the "universalization" or "de-gaying"[1] of AIDS in popular discourse, exemplified, for example, in the now ubiquitous catch-phrase "AIDS effects us all" typical of "liberal" safe(r)-sex campaigns by public health departments. In addition, recent trends in some strains of "postmodern" work have tended to suggest that HIV/AIDS are representative of the inevitability of "epidemic" conditions in the *fin-de-millennium*, not only a unique historically produced medical phenomenon, but also serving as markers for the detritus of the "postmodern" body in an increasingly technological age.[2] AIDS effects us all to the extent that gay men and IV drug users are no longer the exclusive sites of entry for infection and for the continual "threat" of further spread of HIV; AIDS effects us all to the extent that one cannot "escape" being subjected to AIDS discourse on television, in the popular press, even on the streets, almost daily occurrences now in the West. But to what extent does AIDS really "effect us all," what is the nature of that "effect," and is it enough to assume that this "universalization" of AIDS is indicative that the measures taken in the past to provide an analysis of its discourses and the punitive

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[1]For an extended and comprehensive discussion of this, see Edward King, *Safety in Numbers: Safer Sex and Gay Men*, especially chapter 5, "The De-Gaying of AIDS." King writes: "Since the mid-1980s, AIDS has been systematically de-gayed. 'De-gaying' is the term used to describe the denial or downplaying of the involvement of gay men in the HIV epidemic, even when gay men continue to constitute the group most severely affected, and when the lesbian and gay community continues to play a pioneering role in non-governmental (and sometimes governmental) responses, such as the development of policy or the provision of services to people living with HIV" (169).

[2]See, for example, the introduction to Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (eds.), *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America*. For a more critical account of the body of AIDS and postmodernism, see Donna Haraway, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies."

effects on various socially stigmatized groups are no longer necessary or even tenable in the face of the ever expanding and diversifying demographics of this epidemic?

Unfortunately, such a dismissal cannot be so readily supported. Though the landscape is changing, though the "incitement to discourse" (Foucault) has meant that we are talking about AIDS now more than ever, the cultural and social investments (and, indeed, over-investments) in these discourses suggest that AIDS is still framed within the same narratives that characterized its configurations in the early years. In the chapters that follow, I will be arguing that, while perhaps less blatantly biased in its current configurations, perhaps less overt in its moralism, the disciplinary potential of AIDS discourse provides the ground upon which various social and cultural apparatuses facilitate the affirmation of certain kinds of pleasures and bodies and the simultaneous strategic circumvention of "Other" bodies and pleasures. The theoretical impetus of this text will necessarily gesture toward a resistance to the overarching implications of critiques of systems of "ideological hegemony" (homophobia, racism, sexism, etc.), that is, I assume from the outset that these critiques are already too steeped themselves in ideology to be efficacious. Like Foucault's "repressive-hypothesis," this approach insists that the ubiquitous and over-saturated concepts of "oppression" and "marginalization" are by now quite meaningless, that they have lost any cogent signification. In place of a repressive-hypothesis, it is my hope to offer a consideration of the ways in which various discursive narratives of AIDS are circulated within popular discourse, without denying, however, the potency of certain "ideological structures" for inciting these very narratives. In short, this approach seeks to ask and identify what gets prescribed in the course of certain proscriptive practices in the discursive narrative framing of AIDS.

In doing so, this project will argue in favour of a theory of representation of "difference" as a strategy of "displacement," whereby AIDS functions within social discourse to either implicitly or explicitly invoke that which is culturally "Other" (homosexuality as "Other," the "feminine" as "Other," AIDS itself as "Other") with the

resultant effect of the alleviation *or* the production of cultural anxieties that often bear no "rational" or tenable response to the "real" threat posed by this disease. By provoking or displacing these anxieties at the site of the "Other," popular AIDS discourse functions as the orchestration and mobilization of what I will be referring to as the cultural logic of "*dis*-ease," an "epidemic logic" (Singer) characterized by paradox: the hyphen is instructive here, underscoring a double operation whereby AIDS is configured in discourse both as "disease," a very real medical condition that directly affects and destroys individual immune functioning, but also as a social condition in the age of AIDS that either displaces fears and anxieties (that is, to offer a sense of "ease") or unnecessarily provokes them (the prefix "dis" here signifying "apart," "away"--that is, to move in the direction not of "ease" but of fear).

The "threat" posed by AIDS is not exclusively "about" the disintegration of systems of order in the corporeal constitution of body, but of the disintegration of the dichotomous configurations of order (Self/Other) that constitute those very bodies within the hierarchies of the social spectrum. In this way we might consider *dis*-ease as a manifestation of what Marjorie Garber, in a rather different context, has termed "category crisis:" "a failure of definitional distinction, a border line that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another," a "crisis" that is marked by and constitutive of "cultural anxiety."[3] As epistemic logic, *dis*-ease works in part to render AIDS "an industry of discourse" (Watney), or "an epidemic of signification" (Treichler), but it is an industry in which a whole discursive field of social symbolic relations is brought into play--and, at times, radically disrupted. Consistent with the changing demographic landscape of the epidemic, AIDS is figured within discourse, on the one hand, as an unstable or multi-accentual signifier, "a rupture in the order of things" (Singer), a disruption of the very distinction between "Self" and "Other" upon which our most fundamental social relations are founded. When AIDS threatens to disrupt the boundaries

[3]Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* 16.

of the social body, when it threatens to break beyond those stigmatized social fields with which AIDS has and is always already associated, the logic of *dis*-ease necessitates that popular AIDS discourse recuperates and stabilizes these uncertain signifying configurations, even if this recuperation relies on phantasmatic conceptualizations of AIDS that bear a radical discontinuity with the current demographics of the disease. The resultant effect of this recuperation is that that which is marked as culturally "Other" is outside the narrative framing of AIDS, yet paradoxically always already present to serve as the site for the conferral of a phantasmatic conceptualization of a stable and coherent social body.

On the other hand, AIDS is still figured within discourse as the site for the conferral of phantasmatic notions of sexuality, that is, it continues to function as a stable and coherent signifier. Specifically, the social symbolic relations permitting the assumption that having AIDS makes one a *de facto* homosexual, and, inversely, that being a homosexual makes one a *de facto* "victim" of AIDS, suggests a tendency toward mastery in cultural discourse assuring that the spectacularized and/or pathologized images of gay men will persist, constructing the queer male body as always already AIDS-ridden, always already on the verge of death ("the body of the condemned"[4]), or within the codes of an unsatiated, unstoppable, sexually adventurous and unhealthy body. More than just indicative of the linear determinism characteristic of a homophobic culture, these cultural practices are part of what I refer to as the "incidental" construction of homosexuality, implying that the representation of the queer male body in popular cultural spaces often functions in subordinate conjunction to a larger "liberal" agenda that ultimately displaces bodily specificity and commitment to a "queer agenda" in order to highlight and subsequently valorize more traditional value systems and social-sexual configurations. While not necessarily "condemning" homoerotic desire, these practices displace *dis*-ease (anxiety) at the site of the "Other," despite the ostensible subject matters these practices address. At this historic moment in the current sexual economy, the queer male body is not sufficient or as

[4]This phrase is taken from the title of the first chapter of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish.*

yet culturally valorized enough to stand on its own, and must therefore be supported (or is the support) by other issues, concerns, pleasures, subjectivities, in short, other bodies.

Of particular import for these polemics is Linda Singer's text *Erotic Welfare: Sexual Theory and Politics in the Age of Epidemic*, to which much of this present project will be heavily indebted. Taking the lead of Michel Foucault's work on technologies of power in various epistemes, and Jean Baudrillard's work on the contemporary sexual economy (the "joint investments of economic and erotic relations of exchange"[5]), Singer offers a theoretical consideration of the function and effect of "power" in the sexual economy of late-capitalist culture, a period she defines as an "age of epidemic."[6] Specifically, Singer focuses in part on power's exclusionary tendencies, its "radical erasures" or "constitutive exclusions," providing an analysis of the ways in which the "exclusion" of certain subjects within systems of representation operate in a paradoxical and contradictory fashion, especially how women and gay men in particular are excluded from certain "masculine" systems yet "everywhere rearticulated *within* that system as fetishized objects, phantasmatic sites of erotic over-investment."[7] Relying on a notion of "commodity fetishism," defined as "the construction of an object in and through an over-investment of value,"[8] Singer is interested in the circulation of various subjects as objects within the economy of exchange. Her analysis of the discourse of AIDS starts from this very premise, serving as the point of departure for consideration of a larger cultural phenomenon currently pervasive in the age of AIDS (or "age of epidemic"), what Singer refers to as a "logic of contagion" or a "panic logic," which can be defined as follows:

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[5]Singer 9.

[6]"Singer's grammar is instructive here, for it is no longer a matter of referring to 'a' or 'the' epidemic, for 'epidemic' has lost its article; it is no longer an issue, a fact, a phenomenon. It has lost its discreteness and become a condition, no longer an object of knowledge, but a contemporary epistemic condition of articulation" (Butler, in Singer 11).

[7]Singer 5; please note that many of the quotations that will follow are taken not directly from Singer but from Judith Butler's introduction to *Erotic Welfare*. Singer left her text only in manuscript form before her untimely death. Butler has written a very comprehensive introduction in stride with the impulse of Singer's work. References to *Erotic Welfare* will clearly indicate whether quotations are from Butler's introduction or from the actual text by Singer.

[8]Butler, in Singer 7.

> the sexual panic prompted by AIDS has pervaded the political and cultural life of the United States in recent years and has spawned a *logic of contagion*, a "panic logic," [. . .] an upsurge in regulatory power that extends itself through the proliferation and production of more and different sites of erotic danger. The fear of contagion which in some sense located itself in relation to AIDS far exceeds the threats posed by that illness; [. . .] there is a veritable "outbreak" of new "epidemics," such as teenage pregnancy and drug abuse, which are figured within cultural discourse as threatening social phenomena with the capacity to spread.[9]

Though not fundamentally "about" AIDS, panic logic suggests that certain narratives of AIDS have not only intensified cultural and social configurations of other "epidemic" conditions (Singer gives the examples of "The War on Drugs," or the "Just Say No" campaign to anything and everything which is socially constructed as "unhealthy"), but that these narratives themselves "can be read as a refusal to address AIDS [. . .] through deflecting the productive dimensions of power away from those who are suffering," which then constructs "those vulnerable populations [. . .] as the very site of danger from whom protection and safety must be secured."[10]

In much of what follows, I will be interested in Singer's comments as they reflect on the nature and function of the familial economy in the representational system of AIDS, especially as this economy intersects with the representation of the multiple "Other" as a phantasmatic site of erotic over-investment.[11] For example, Singer has intriguingly suggested that the over-investment of value in the familial economy has permitted a tremendous amount of violence in relation to popular reconfigurations of gay men's responses and interventions to the physical reality and the psychic devastation AIDS has inflicted on our community:

> The notion of "safe sex" [. . .] has been appropriated by culturally conservative critics to argue that the nuclear family is the safest sex

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[9]Butler, in Singer 6.

[10]Butler, in Singer 10-11.

[11]Of course, Singer is not the first to draw these connections. Watney argued well before that "We are not, in fact, living through a distinct, coherent and progressing 'moral panic' about Aids. Rather, we are witnessing the latest variation in the spectacle of the defensive ideological rearguard action which has been mounted on behalf of 'the family' for more than a century" (*Policing Desire* 43.)

> around: "In an era of panic sexuality, the family is being repackaged as a prophylactic social device." This vulgar expropriation of the call to "safety," which originally developed within the context of gay men's outreach and self-education projects in progressive health work, implies that homosexuality itself is unsafe, a notion that is directly counter to the original meaning of the phrase: gay male sex can be made safe. Hence, gay men and others within the AIDS community who have issued the call for safety in sex are transfigured by this reappropriation into the very site of erotic danger from whom protection is required.[12]

The notions of "panic logic," "erotic over-investment," "epidemic," "the family," will appear and reappear as dominant motifs throughout much of this present work, as will the motifs of "difference," "displacement," and "*dis*-ease." For now I am introducing the theoretical impulse of Singer's text in order to position myself theoretically within AIDS discourse analysis in an attempt to move beyond the linear determinism of critiques of hegemony and reflect on a more pervasive understanding of the larger structures of power that govern and discipline the narratives of AIDS and those bodies and subjectivities that are most heavily invested in their political configurations.

In addition to the material cited above, I will make occasional and passing references throughout to Elizabeth Grosz's recent text *Volatile Bodies*, particularly her comments on Foucault's technologies of power.[13] Consistent with Singer, Grosz in part invokes Foucault to provide a matrix for understanding the function of the familial structure of desire within AIDS discourse and public health policy, a structure that operates paradoxically in a way analogous to the comments about power and discourse by Singer (*vis-à-vis* Foucault):

> Foucault outlines a number of lines of proliferation and specification of sexuality which emerged gradually during the eighteenth century, in particular the twofold movement centrifugally circling the heterosexual, monogamous couple. On one hand, there is a

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[12] Butler, in Singer 8.

[13] I realize that to isolate this paradigm of Grosz's exhaustive book is perhaps counter-productive or contradictory in terms of the theoretical impulse of *Volatile Bodies*, which seeks to use Foucault in part to get beyond Foucault, to move, that is, "toward a corporeal feminism" that resists the limited paradigm of the "body as inscriptive surface" exemplified in the Foucauldian model. But Grosz offers poignant insight into this period of Foucault's *oeuvre*, and she does not dismiss the efficacy of this work outright.

> proliferation and dispersion of sexuality and of sexual "types," which are defined in terms of their deviation or departure from the heterosexual, marital norm. In this movement there is an increasing specification and focus on the sexuality of children, the mad, the criminal, homosexuals, perverts, etc. On the other hand, there is an increasing discretion granted to the heterosexual couple, who, while remaining the pivot and frame of reference for the specification of these other sexualities, are less subject to scrutiny and intervention, are granted a form of discursive privacy. One must assume that in the era of AIDS, it is still the sexuality of marginalized groups--gay men, intravenous drug users, prostitutes--that is increasingly administered, targeted, by public health policy, while the sexuality of the reproductive couple, especially of the husband/father, remains almost entirely unscrutinized, though his (undetected) secret activities--his clandestine bisexuality or drug use--may be responsible for the spread of the virus into hitherto "safe" (heterosexual) populations.[14]

Consistent in the texts cited above and in AIDS discourse analysis in general is the profound and unrelenting influence of the work of Foucault, particularly the theoretical and methodological models developed from the period of *Discipline and Punish* to the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*.[15]Foucault's work, no doubt, has provided the principle and most potent framework for consideration of technologies of the body and of sexuality in the punitive and disciplinary practices facilitated by the AIDS epidemic, perhaps because no one but Foucault could offer ground upon which to argue for the seriousness with which to treat the political implications when subjects become "objects of knowledge" rather than creators of a discourse. Foucault's influence has been unparalleled in these discursive spaces (and others) because he also necessarily rejects a theory of ideology in place of an "analytics of power" (*The History of Sexuality*) or of "discourse" and "discursive formation," a rather attractive methodological position for those who are

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[14]Grosz 153. These comments are a direct reiteration of Volume I of *The History of Sexuality*, where Foucault writes: "The legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion. It tended to function as a norm, one that was stricter, perhaps, but quieter. On the other hand, what came under scrutiny was the sexuality of children, mad men and women, and criminals; the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex . [. . .] It was time for all these figures, scarcely noticed in the past, to step forward and speak, to make the difficult confession of what they were. No doubt they were condemned all the same" (38-39). I quote Grosz here in the main text instead of Foucault because Grosz effectively engages AIDS in a way that Foucault could obviously not have done. One can see the potency of Foucault here for AIDS discourse, especially the ways in which AIDS is stepping forward to speak (the "incitement to discourse") but is "condemned" all the same.

[15]See, for example, Watney, *Policing Desire*; James Miller (ed.) *Fluid Exchanges: Artists and Critics in the AIDS Crisis*

cautious about reinvigorating their own moralistic and ideological agendas in the critiques undertaken, the "will to knowledge" rather than the "will to truth" (a gesture we might strive for but which we would be naive to assume we could ever fully achieve). As a methodological framework, a Foucauldian analysis of social and cultural practices would require that we:

> account for the fact that it [in this case, sex] is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said [. . .] The over-all "discursive fact," the way in which sex is "put into discourse."[16]

Foucault's notion of discourse is inextricably bound to a notion of discursive formation, the distribution and dispersion of statements within the power-knowledge nexus. Foucault defines "discursive formation" as follows:

> discursive formation really is the principle of dispersion and redistribution, not of formulations, not of sentences, not of propositions, but of statements [. . .] the term discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation.[17]

This methodological position of discursive formation will animate and structure the investigations that follow, the ways in which AIDS is "put into discourse," to offer an analysis of its representations "by relating them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse and thus constitute the conditions of their historical appearance [and] the nexus of regularities that governs their dispersion."[18] A Foucauldian analysis of the body of AIDS and its relationship to power necessitates an understanding of the ways in which the body is constructed and manipulated to legitimize dominant value systems in the power-knowledge nexus of the current episteme, what one writer has termed "the body as inscriptive surface" (Grosz).

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[16] Volume 1, *The History of Sexuality* 11; all subsequent references to *The History of Sexuality* will be from Volume 1: *An Introduction.*

[17] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 107.

[18] Foucault, *Archaeology* 47-48.

Though this project will not make reference to Foucault's later epistemological shift toward technologies or "care of the self," I will insist in the present context on resisting the monolithic nature of Foucault's technologies of the body (the "docile body"), positioning myself within discourse analysis without recourse to the totalizing effects of power that is implied in this period of Foucault's *oeuvre*. Though Foucault himself suggests in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* the concept of a "reverse-discourse"[19] to counter-balance the disciplinary effects of power, it is a concept that remains theoretically undeveloped and that is never practiced or documented in any of the "historical" studies Foucault undertakes.[20] For this reason, the final chapter of this present work, which offers an examination of what might be called a reverse-*AIDS*-discourse, a counter-discursive narrative to the types of AIDS discourse a Foucauldian critique has much to offer, will in part leave Foucault behind--not necessarily to underscore the limitations of a Foucauldian approach, but in order to uncover not only the disciplinary and regulatory apparatuses AIDS can elicit, but also to suggest the kinds of resistances they necessitate and produce.

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Leo Bersani has written that "analysis, while necessary, may also be an indefensible luxury."[21] That is a phrase I find myself increasingly cathecting. The more heavily invested I become in producing "scholarly" and "theoretical" responses to the AIDS crisis, the more attention I pay to AIDS "discourse," the more I find myself in the punitive position of assuming that I am moving further and further away from the "reality" of AIDS.

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[19]In a now famous passage, Foucault writes that "the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphrodism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledge, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (101).

[20]For a comprehensive overview of the limitations of this period in Foucault's work, see Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism*

[21]Bersani, "Is the Rectum A Grave?" 199.

As someone who can carry out a project like the present one because I have the "luxury" of doing analysis as a result of the "luxury" of my health, I find it sometimes overwhelming in the face of the critiques I am about to make to reconcile the fact that I am not infected (though I *am* affected) by this virus, that I have the time and energy and resources to undertake such a project rather than confronting the acid terrors of just trying to struggle to stay healthy against a virus that seems to increasingly up the ante. Of what use, I ask myself, is any of this to people with AIDS, or to those like myself who are most at risk for future infection? In a word, what *corporeal* significance can one glean from such *epistemological* critiques?

The only response I can content myself with at this time is the fact that I have cathected the images and representations that will follow, because I realize that to some extent we *do* live our sexual bodies through the mediation of cultural representations, and that these representations are in part mediated through the lived experience of the body. The "reality" of AIDS is in part structured through these systems of signification, which, though not totalized in its effects on subjectivity and identity, have a very "real" effect on how we make sense of ourselves and of the world we inhabit.

Though by writing I may never save a life or decrease the suffering, to attempt to understand certain systems of discourse in the representational economy of AIDS is to attempt to gesture in the direction of a critical undoing of those very systems, an undoing that I recognize as both a "necessity" and a "luxury."

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals

the power of your intense fragility: whose texture

compels me with the colour of its countries,

rendering death and forever with each breathing

--e. e. cummings

CHAPTER ONE:

"RISK(Y) MANAGEMENT:' PURITY, DANGER, AND THE DISCOURSE OF "TAINTED-BLOOD"

> Pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined. A polluting person is always in the wrong. He has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed some line which should not have been crossed and this *displacement* unleashes *danger*. [. . .] The power which presents a danger . . . is very evidently a power inhering in ideas, a power by which the structure is expected to protect itself.
>
> --Mary Douglas[22]

> **tainted.** 1. Stained, tinged; contaminated, infected, corrupted; touched with putrefaction or incipient decay; affected with some corrupting influence. 2. imbued with the scent of an animal.
>
> **taint.** 1. A stain, a blemish; a sullying spot; a touch, trace, shade, tinge, or tincture of some bad or undesirable quality; a touch of discredit, dishonour, or disgrace; a slur.
> 2. A contaminating, corrupting, or depraving influence, physical or moral; a cause or condition of corruption or decay; an infection.
> 1. To convict, prove guilty. 2. To prove (a charge). To subject to attainder. 4. To accuse of crime or dishonour.[23]

The social body is a body that cannot tolerate liminality. By liminality I mean to imply the transgression of border states, the disruption of those ostensibly coherent and socially sanctioned boundaries marked by the binary configurations of: Self/Other, inside/outside, order/disorder, clean/dirty, contaminated/contaminating, closed/open, cleansing/polluting, proper/improper, unpenetrable/penetrated, etc. As Grosz has recently argued, these boundaries of the body inscribe and mark certain body "types" in certain ways, so that "a different type of body is produced in and through the different sexual and cultural practices [. . .] undertake[n]."[24] Taking these processes as axiomatic, the purpose of this chapter will be to investigate and interrogate the ways in which, and to what ends, the liminality of the body is circulated into cultural discourse, and to consider the various

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[22]Douglas, *Purity and Danger* 113; (italics added).
[23]*Oxford English Dictionary*
[24]Grosz 200.

social mechanisms called upon to elicit faith in the phantasmatic possibility and necessity of maintaining the borders of the body, or the recuperation of that phantasmatic possibility when these borders have already been subjected to transgressions of various kinds. It will also address the question of the "lived experience of the body" (Grosz), especially as this experience informs and makes possible the potential of a discourse of liminality and the effective displacement of that very potential. In other words, I wish to argue that, in our post-liberation episteme, certain discursive frames structure certain bodies within cultural discourse in such a way as to offer a phantasmatic belief in the efficacy and possibility of a coherent, fixed, closed, clean, proper, unpenetrated and unpenetrable social body, and that these discourses are informed and shaped by the cultural investments of the lived experience of those bodies always already outside the parametres of these discursive frames.

Under the cultural logic of *dis*-ease in general and a notion of liminality in particular, this chapter will begin an extensive analysis of the nature and function of certain discursive formations of AIDS in our current sexual economy, specifically taking the above comments as a critical point of departure for an examination of the discourse of the "tainted-blood scandal"--a phrase put into cultural circulation as a result of the recent Krever Commission on the Canadian Red Cross Society, which investigates how and why over one thousand people (mostly hemophiliacs) were infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, the virus believed to cause AIDS) through transfused blood products in the early nineteen eighties. The commission was established not only to determine the course of events that led to the so-called "scandal," but also seeks to assess the "safety" or "purity" of the current blood system, what is referred to in popular discourse as "risk management"--a term any fan of Foucault would immediately recognize as rife with signification.[25]

[25]The term itself is also consistent with Singer's (*vis-à-vis* Foucault) working definition of "epidemic:" "An epidemic is a phenomenon that in its very representation calls for, indeed, seems to demand some form of *managerial* response, some mobilized effect of control" (27; italics added).

The "tainted-blood scandal," it would appear, offers a social configuration of AIDS that is unprecedented in the entire history of the epidemic: unprecedented because, rather than serving to affirm "the truth of gay identity as death or death wish;"[26] rather than functioning as a convenient ontological tool for orchestrating and reinvigorating homophobic assumptions about gay sexuality as pathology and/or as diseased itself that have from the very beginning structured the responses to this epidemic;[27] rather than serving, that is, as a stable and coherent signifier, AIDS as it is configured in the "tainted-blood scandal" constitutes an unstable, multi-accentual signifier, and underscores the extreme anxiety produced on the cultural and social levels when AIDS threatens the coherent boundaries of the social body. "Tainted-blood," in short, would seem to affirm the "universalization" of AIDS, and would thus serve as a cultural indicator that those deemed to occupy sites of "high risk" no longer function as the exclusive entry points for new infections. The cultural logic of *dis*-ease, however, assures that, over and against the destabalizing logic of the "tainted-blood scandal," these discourses and the social and cultural apparatuses informing them will attempt the recuperation of a phantasmatic belief in the coherency of the social body, even in this the site for the seeming conferral of body liminality. Configured as a site of cultural and sexual anxiety, the articulation of the body's liminality strikes up against some of our culture's strongest and most tenacious social, political and psychological convictions.

As a manifestation, perhaps, of a "category crisis" (Garber), and taking the cue from Douglas's influential text *Purity and Danger*, my analysis of the discourse of "tainted-blood" will implicitly address the following central questions: What notions of "order" are put into play against the essential "disorderliness" plaguing the Canadian Blood System? What, in effect, is so *scandalous* about the "tainted-blood scandal"? What exactly constitutes "scandal," and of what is "scandal" constitutive? Similarly, what constitutes

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[26]Paul Morrison, "End Pleasure" 55.

[27]Cf.: Watney, *Policing Desire*, and *Taking Liberties* (eds. Watney and Erica Carter); Cindy Patton, *Inventing AIDS* ; Douglas Crimp (ed.) *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*

"purity" and "danger" in the sexual and representational economy of AIDS, and of what are "purity" and "danger" constitutive? Whose pleasure and/or power is served by the narrative framing of AIDS as a "scandal"? And, finally, what social and cultural mechanisms are in place that would facilitate and legitimize a discourse of blood as "tainted" in the first place?

The "tainted-blood scandal" underscores the ways in which AIDS is configured in cultural discourse as a site of "over-investment" (Singer), and as a manifestation of the "upsurge in regulatory power that extends itself through the proliferation and production of more and different sites of erotic danger" that "far exceed the threats posed by [AIDS]." This will be addressed in the context of the legal and cultural practices that inform the discourses of the "tainted-blood scandal," and will constitute the first part of this chapter. The paradoxical nature of power, its "constitutive exclusions" that produce the phenomenon it seeks to regulate and control, will be implicitly addressed throughout, but will receive fuller attention and consideration in the final pages--specifically in relation to the social symbolic relations that facilitate the linguistic inscription of blood that is "tainted."

Given the barrage of media attention surrounding this blemish on the history of the Canadian Red Cross (daily coverage for a period of several months--from the end of 1994 to the beginning of 1995--and periodic coverage up to the present day[28]), and the volatile and highly charged political and emotional atmosphere it has engendered, I would be inclined to argue further that the "tainted-blood scandal" offers the possibility for the social and cultural configuration of an outbreak of a new "epidemic"--where AIDS breaks beyond the boundaries of the sexual body and into the social body and is thus rendered as so

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[28]The final report of the Krever Commission is scheduled for December 1995.
See also Vic Parsons, *Bad Blood: The Tragedy of the Canadian Tainted Blood Scandal*, yet another text in the proliferation of discourses of the Krever Commission. "A true-life murder mystery, *Bad Blood* documents the destruction of 80 per cent of Canada's hemophiliac population, 1,000 mainly young men who received blood coagulants that should have prolonged their lives but instead infected them with the AIDS virus [sic]. It includes a cast of *innocent victims*, quarrelling scientists, *villains* who lacked moral courage, and *heroes* who disobeyed orders. Vic Parsons, a newspaper man, picks up where another journalist, Randy Shilts, left off. Shilts's 1987 book, *And The Band Played On*, chronicles an earlier dark chapter in the AIDS story, its spread among American homosexuals" (*Globe and Mail* 13 May, 1995/C7).

pervasive and inevitable that "safe(r) sex" practices are no longer sufficient or tenable to protect oneself from a virus that is no longer exclusively sexual in nature. The insistence on the necessity and efficacy of "risk management" against the perceived capacity for the continued flow of "tainted" blood into the system, and its ability to spread beyond the boundaries of sexual bodies to hitherto unaffected bodies, often beyond the boundaries of the blood system itself, suggests a logic of contagion that bears no "rational" response to the evidence put forth about the "risks" of infection through the exchange of blood, and might therefore be figured in cultural discourse as threatening social phenomenon itself.[29]

Furthermore, as an over-investment of AIDS, the discourse of "tainted-blood" has the potential to "reroute[] political attention and resources away from the task of providing the concrete services that those who live and suffer with AIDS require."[30] In short, rather than focusing on the "beneficent effects of power" (Singer) of social services for those who suffer from AIDS or are at risk for HIV-infection, the cultural logic of displacement reconfigures *dis*-ease to rationalize "the intensification of regulatory regimes centred on phantasmatic sites of erotic danger, those cultural sites of erotic exchange which threaten the hegemony of the traditional family within the political imaginary."[31]

There are two tensions at work here that will now be considered specifically in relation to the discourse of "tainted-blood": First, "the intensification of regulatory regimes" in the age of epidemic, and second, the perceived threat that AIDS poses to the familial

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[29]For example: on Monday, February 6, 1995, "CBC Prime Time News" opened the evening with a story about a hospital in Alberta that had recently contacted 170 patients who had undergone invasive surgery by a doctor recently diagnosed with HIV. Although all standard medical procedures where undertaken in *every single case*, and although the hospital, the government and the CBC declared that the chance that any of these people were infected from this doctor was next to impossible and extremely unlikely, these people where notified and the story was the opening item for the evening's news. In addition, the doctor in question--who was cooperating fully with the notification procedures--tendered his resignation. The CBC's commentary by Peter Mansbridge suggested that this move to notify every patient was necessary because "the recent Krever Commission on the Red Cross has raised public awareness about AIDS." I'm more inclined to think the Krever Commission has incited public panic about AIDS, and that this is another manifestation of "panic logic," or the logic of *dis*-ease, where the "tainted-blood scandal" has explicitly provoked the unnecessary production of sites of danger beyond the sexual, where "epidemic conditions rationalize the augmentation of regulatory apparatuses beyond any justifiable or instrumental purpose" (Butler, in Singer 7).

[30]Butler, in Singer 6.

[31]Butler, in Singer 6.

unit, which functions as the exemplary model for the coherency of the social body. This particular "scandal" can be seen to conform to the processes of regulatory intensification in several ways, specifically in its medical and juridical investments, which articulate concerns and anxieties that far exceed the "threat" posed by AIDS. For example, in the process of the hearings at the Krever Commission, the Canadian Red Cross Society sought legal recourse to release and make public the names and addresses of those donors who donated the "tainted" blood that led to the "contamination" of the blood supply in the first place, an unprecedented request in Canadian AIDS law that was contested by the Canadian AIDS Society *vis-à-vis* the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Caught in the public scorn and humiliation of the "tainted-blood scandal," and quickly losing the trust and faith of the general population, the Red Cross felt it had a moral and legal obligation to trace the donors of HIV-infected ("tainted") blood, to inform them of their condition, and thereby serve to protect the "public" from further contamination, while also, hopefully, raising faith once again in the organization. The Canadian AIDS Society protested the move, arguing that by identifying the donors, the Red Cross would explicitly be violating those donors civil rights, since they never agreed to have their blood tested for HIV when they donated it more than ten years ago (it is illegal in Canada, under any circumstances, to test someone for HIV *without* consent). The Red Cross won the case, and the Canadian AIDS Society has subsequently filed an appeal.[32]

I am more interested here in framing this debate not around notions of "civil rights" versus "public health," collectivism versus individualism, but rather, around the contradictory yet uncontested logic that such a case makes explicit. As a manifestation of the cultural logic of *dis*-ease in the age of AIDS, we need to ask specifically whose interests are being served by publicly identifying these donors as sites of erotic danger, and to

[32]The appeal was successful, and the Red Cross has temporarily been barred from releasing names. Cf.: "AIDS Society moves to stop Red Cross from baring list of donors with HIV," (*Gazette* 25 Oct. 94/B1); "Bad-blood donors can't be identified," (*Globe and Mail* 27 Oct. S :, A10); "Red Cross allowed to release names of infected donors," (*Gazette* 11 Nov. 94, B1); and "Charter cited in appeal of ruling on tainted-blood donors," (*Globe and Mail* 15 Nov. 94); "AIDS Society wins new hearing on disclosure," (*Globe and Mail* 17 Jan. 95/A3).

consider what is effectively displaced by the over-investments in the legal and medical discourses surrounding this case. Might it be possible to assume that the release of donors names is a manifestation of the ways in which

> the recent heightening of sexual regulation that is in some ways prompted by the AIDS crisis comes to exceed the bounds of AIDS and to establish a contemporary regime in which epidemic conditions rationalize the augmentation of regulatory apparatuses beyond any justifiable or instrumental purpose.[33]

A panic logic, or logic of contagion, is directly brought into focus in this case here, for such a scenario only serves to increase regulation in the interest of "risk management" yet paradoxically serves no instrumental or effective purpose for further prevention of HIV transmission through blood or blood product transfusions. The media have repeatedly (and rightly) insisted that:

> since most of those who were HIV-infected ten years ago will already have developed AIDS symptoms, the number of donors who have not already discovered they are infected will be small. Researchers have suggested the number is between *five and 16.*[34]

> Although there are probably fewer than 20 infected donors still alive, "the ramifications are serious," said Russell Armstrong, spokesman for the AIDS Society. People who wish to take [use] of Ontario's anonymous HIV-testing programs might fear their names would be circulated despite promises of confidentiality, the Society argued. Two groups that represent blood recipients--the Canadian Hemophiliac Society and the Hepatitis C group--both urged the court to order that donors be notified.[35]

In addition to a volatile case that concerns such a small number of people, the illogical rationale behind the contacting of donors suggests that what is being regulated here is not the "purity" of the blood supply, but the whole sexual economy in an age of danger, the proliferation of phantasmatic sites of "risk" necessitating the intensification of "management" procedures that far exceed even the perceived "threats" to the blood supply articulated by the Red Cross. Although there is, to be sure, a very "real" (yet small) medical threat at hand, since the possibility of infected donations as a consequence of the six-month

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[33]Butler, in Singer 7.

[34]*Globe and Mail* (26 Oct. 94/ A4; italics added).

[35]*Gazette* (1 Nov. 94/B4).

"window" period--when HIV can remain dormant in an individual's blood, and hence remain undetected by the Elisa and Western Blot tests (the tests for sero-positivity)--poses a problem for the Red Cross in the interests of "risk management" and for those whose lives depend on frequent transfusions of other people's blood and blood products, the donors the Red Cross wants to contact were infected at least *10 years ago*, and, assuming any of them are still alive (the average maximum life expectancy from the time of HIV-infection is ten to twelve years), would, therefore, never pose a "threat" to the blood supply, since if they were ever to donate blood (and this is a further leap in logic, since, assuming they would already know their condition they would not be giving blood), the mandatory testing of all blood products now implemented would detect infection. With this illogical premise, what exactly is being regulated here? What exactly constitutes "risk," and how and why is "risk" being managed over and above the threat of "tainted-blood"?

To offer a partial answer to these questions, I would argue that, under the logic of *dis*-ease, we are witness here to the public attempt to lull the popular imaginary into a sense of security, safety, in short, to produce a sense of "ease" from the cultural anxiety resulting from a threat that does not really exist. As a threat more accentuated as a media phenomenon than a medical one, the discourse of "tainted-blood" paradoxically provokes more panic, not less, displacing "ease" while also perhaps seducing (unsuccessfully) the public into complacency with the government and the Red Cross who really only have "the interests of the public in mind." Though it is, no doubt, the medico-juridical mandate of The Red Cross to ensure the "purity" of the blood system, the legal ramifications of this case suggest that the Red Cross is demanding the right to extend its power beyond the screening of blood and blood donors to the screening of unsafe sexual practices in general, a "policing of desire" over and above their mandate.

Thus Justice Doug Carruthers (of Ontario Court General division), who made the ruling, has argued that this case is "not about the rights of the few individuals, but about

the health and well-being of our society."[36] Similarly, The Canadian Association of Transfused Hepatitis C Survivors (who, rumour has it, are in the process of developing their own twelve-step program), and The Canadian Hemophiliac Society (who, one would believe, have a vested interest in protecting themselves from infected transfusions, possibly from these very individuals whom they seek to name) never entertain the possibility that, as mentioned, the tracing of these donors would not possibly serve the purpose of reducing risk of future infections through transfused blood or blood products. Not content with protecting hemophiliacs from infected blood, they, like the government who ruled in their favour, are on a crusade to protect the nation as a whole not from unsafe blood products but from unsafe sexual practices over which they could not possibility have any control. A lawyer representing the Hepatitis C group argues that "Some infected donors may not yet have developed AIDS and could be infecting others."[37]While serving to underscore the proliferation of regulatory apparatuses beyond any justifiable purpose, the cultural logic implicit in these arguments displaces the possibility that knowledge of HIV status does necessarily *guarantee* behavioral changes,[38]and, more importantly, precludes any acknowledgment that individual's also have a responsibility and a capacity for protecting themselves in a way that government legislation does not or cannot.[39]

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[36]qtd. in *Globe and Mail* (11 Nov. 94 /A6).

[37]*Gazette* (1 Nov. 94/B4).

[38]For a discussion of this, see Patton, *Inventing AIDS*

[39]The social ramifications of a recent AIDS-related court case similarly displace notions of individual responsibility for safe(r) sex practices: three Ontario women were awarded $25, 000 each when they were infected from unprotected intercourse with a man who knew he was HIV-positive but did not disclose his sero-status to these women. "Ontario's Divisional Court raised to $25, 000 from $15, 000 the individual awards given to three women who contracted the AIDS virus [sic] after being infected by the same man [. . .] three judges [. . .] rejected a decision of Ontario's criminal Injuries Board, which ruled last year that the maximum award of $25,000 that is permitted under provincial law should be reduced by 40 percent, on the grounds that the women contributed to their plight by engaging in unprotected sex. The court said the Criminal Injuries Boerd 'erred in law in demanding an unreasonably high standard of behaviour' from the women. The judges said the board appeared 'to have wrongly assumed that the victims knew that there was a big risk, and that they had a significant degree of control with respect to unprotected sex.' Noting that all three women said that Charles Ssenyonga [of London, Ontario] had told them he was in good health, the court said it was 'not unreasonable for the victims to [ask questions about his health] and for them to accept his answers as truthful.' The court added that while the three women 'may not have been extremely cautious, it cannot be said that their behaviour fell below the standard of a reasonable person' "(*Globe and Mail* 13 Feb. 1995/A7).

In an attempt to "allay public fears about the blood supply," a speech by a member of the Red Cross is met with hostility from the president of the Canadian Hemophiliac Society, a recurring voice (they have "official status" at The Krever Commission) in this on-going narrative, accusing the Red Cross of reinforcing " 'the same kind of decision-making processes' that led to a thousand hemophiliacs being infected with the AIDS virus [sic] from transfusions in the first place." Similarly, a spokesman for The Canadian Association of Transfused Hepatitis C Survivors called the speech "more of the same of trying to lull the public into a false sense of trust." These comments despite the following statistics:

> not a single case of infection with hepatitis or human immunodeficiency virus has been identified with the use of "plasma-based fractioned products" since 1988. Blood components [. . .] cannot be treated with the same process to kill viruses, but only 13 cases of HIV transmitted infection have been recorded since 1985, even though more than 10.5 million blood donations have been made and two million blood transfusions have been performed. Since [. . .] 1990 there has been only one confirmed case of hepatitis B or C transmitted through blood components.[40]

For a "narrative' account of the "story" of Charles Ssenyonga and the women he infected, see June Callwood, *Trial Without End: A Shocking Story of Women and AIDS*, which turns Charles Ssenyonga into the African-Canadian version of "Patient Zero" (see last chapter of this thesis). "A pervasive urban myth a few years back was the dubious story of a mysterious and beautiful woman who would bed unsuspecting men for a night of spectacular sex. In the morning, she would be gone, leaving only a message in lipstick on the bathroom mirror: 'Welcome to the world of AIDS.' Charles Ssenyonga was the male version of that myth, made real. From the mid-1980s, when the risk of AIDS from heterosexual contact was still thought to be next to till, until his death two years ago, Ssenyonga knowingly exposed at least 10 women in Canada to the human immunodeficiency virus that causes AIDS. *So contagious was he* that every woman who had unprotected sex with him, even once, became infected with HIV. [. . .] These are not your expected AIDS profiles. The first to be diagnosed, 'Jennifer Anderson' [a pseudonym], is the child of a privileged household that put great stock in *responsible behaviour* and *good manners*. She was considered by her friends to be 'something of a sexual prude.' But on meeting Ssenyonga at a cousin's dinner party, she was intoxicated by the African curio vendor's *smoldering sexuality*, his quick intellect and broad knowledge of law, politics and *African culture*" (*Globe and Mail* 13 May 1995/C8; italics added). The reception of this text here suggests implicitly that Ssenyonga was responsible for bringing AIDS to the heterosexual population, and uncritically utilizes the sexual potency associated with the African body ("so contagious was he"--as if there are varying degrees of "contagiousness," even though HIV is not "contagious" but infectious; "his smoldering sexuality") with which AIDS has always been identified. Though it is impossible to defend anyone who would knowingly infect another with HIV, what is displaced here is the real "shocking story" of women and AIDS: education and self-regulating campaigns that would have prevented these cases of HIV-infection are not adequately reaching this segment of the population. And, to underscore again the cultural logic of *dis*-ease, imagine for a moment the possibility of a sexually active, sero-positive gay man trying to sue for his HIV-infection, even if his behaviour did not fall "below the standard of a reasonable person," that is, if he asked his partner about his health and assumed that to be sufficient for the prevention of HIV.

[40]All of the above quotes are from the *Globe and Mail* (29 Nov. 94).

In addition to these kinds of comments, an interim report of the Krever Commission has recommended that all hospitals in Canada notify every single patient (an estimated 3.5 million people) who received a blood transfusion between 1978 and 1990 to warn them of the risk that they may have contracted HIV or Hepatitis C.[41] As yet another manifestation of panic logic, I'm wondering who will be reading some of these letters, since if people were infected in 1978, they would most certainly be dead by now. The incitement to discourse is also the incitement to panic.

Similarly, the discourse of the "tainted-blood" scandal has spawned yet another site of erotic danger, exemplified in the recent Red Cross blood-drive poster/slogan "Give Without Risk/Donnez Sang Risque,"[42] an indication that public fear and anxiety about blood and AIDS has surpassed a notion of "risk" concomitant with the exchange of fluids through transfusions to render, by a reverse logic, the very act of donating blood itself as a site of "risk," danger or vulnerability. *Dis*-ease here serves to displace the rationale that no one has *ever* been infected by simply *donating* blood. Yet, we are told, "The Red Cross is short of blood, and the attention being focused on the blood supply is at least partly to blame. Perhaps some of the information out of Krever [Commission] is confusing the general public. [. . .] They may have doubts about the blood supply as a whole. Demand is very close to outstripping supply."[43]

To offer a brief summary of the chronology of events that unfolded *vis-à-vis* the Red Cross and the presence of a new viral infection in the socius: in March of 1983 the Red Cross announced that "AIDS was especially prevalent among certain classes of people, including homosexual and bisexual men and new immigrants from Haiti,"[44] and therefore asked that "high risk" donors voluntarily refrain from donating blood; in April of 1984, the

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[41] "Krever urges tainted-blood warning," (*Globe and Mail* 25 Feb. 95/A1).

[42] The French phrase is of course a play on words, with "sang" (blood) and its close proximity to "sans" (without). Though this does not translate as effectively into English, the message is the same in both instances: giving blood is not risky (unless of course you occupy a position of sexual danger).

[43] *Globe and Mail* (13 Dec. 94).

[44] *Gazette* (20 Sept. 94/A4).

Red Cross published a pamphlet about AIDS and distributed it to donors; finally, in April of 1985, the Red Cross implemented a questionnaire asking donors about their sexual activities, a strategy of "risk management" that was as uncertain and problematic as the new virus itself. Given the volatile and ambiguous nature of this historic moment of the crisis, and the anxieties and concerns amongst those already stigmatized groups now being linked exclusively to a deadly virus, it would not be unreasonable to expect that these certain groups would have had a vested interest in questioning the nature and function of the kinds of discourses articulated and the conclusions being drawn about this hitherto unknown virus.

In its coverage of this early period and the uncertainty by which it was characterized, the current discourse of "tainted-blood" recounts these events a decade later, allowing for the rearticulation of the ways in which "Hostility from high-risk groups hampered blood screening."[45] The Montreal *Gazette* informs us, for example, that "hostility was especially acute in Montreal because most Haitian Canadians live here and the city has a large gay population. [. . .] The highly charged atmosphere in 1983 made it difficult to tighten screening of donors and reduce the flow of tainted blood into the system."[46]

I am not interested here in the specific historical events in relation to AIDS and the Red Cross's response; nor I am interested in establishing whether or not "hostility" was a valid form of response from these "high-risk groups;" rather, I am interested in how certain phantasmatic sites of erotic danger are subsequently rearticulated in media discourse and in the popular imaginary, even a decade after the initial events transpired, indicating perhaps some historical continuities in the discursive formations of AIDS. For example, during the media coverage of the Krever Commission, the *Gazette* writes that in February of 1985, The Red Cross opened a blood clinic at the Berri metro station, which is "adjacent to

[45] *Gazette* (20 Sept. 94/A4).
[46] *Gazette* (20 Sept. 94/A4).

Montreal's so-called Gay Village, even though the Red Cross had identified gays as high-risk donors two years before."[47]

In a follow-up article, the *Gazette* tells us that this "Montreal clinic had high HIV rates," and that the Red Cross maintained "blood donor site despite 'potentially dangerous clientele'."[48] Indeed, the statistics for the rates of infection for this particular clinic are alarming, and I will quote them here in full to replicate the impact they might have had on the newspaper audience for reinvigorating the potentiality of this clinic's geographical location as a site of erotic danger, and for redistributing those subjectivities always already in identifiably close proximity to, and therefore constituting, that very literal site:

> [the Berri clinic] collected 50 times as much HIV-contaminated blood as the average Canadian clinic in late 1986. During the first year of testing, 0.042 percent of the blood tested positive in Quebec, three times the rate in Ontario and more than double the national average of 0.017 percent. Of the 236 blood donations across Canada found to be HIV-positive, 124 were in Quebec, and 59 [or 25%] of those were from the downtown Montreal clinic. [. . .] At one of the numerous clinic sessions held at Berri subway station, 0.6 percent of blood donations--six in every 1000--tested positive for the AIDS virus[sic] .[49]

Such alarming statistics serve to paint Montreal as a seething cauldron of viral infection, utilizing perhaps the national reputation of Montreal's gay community as the country's hotbed of unpoliced and uncontrolled homosexual activity--not to mention our great night clubs, which, we already know, leads to more sex. But why the rates of infection in Quebec in general and this Montreal clinic in particular were so high, in comparison to other locales, is all but completely ignored in preference for producing the statistics of infection at this clinic for the reinscription of those sites of danger in ostensible proximity to the clinic itself: gay men, Haitians, (male and female) prostitutes, and IV drug users. Though only one paragraph is devoted to questioning these statistics or analyzing why this

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[47] *Gazette* (20 Sept. 94/A4).
[48] *Gazette* (26 Sept. 94/A2).
[49] *Gazette* (26 Sept. 94/A2).

would be the case, the article concludes by reiterating the possibility for geographically, sexually, and racially contained and containable sites of infection:

> The mobile clinic at Berri station [. . .] straddled Montreal's red-light and pink-light districts, where high-risk prostitutes of both sexes plied their trade. The clinic was not only located in the Gay Village but also among the highest concentration of heroin users in the country, and adjacent to the University of Quebec at Montreal, which has a high concentration of Haitian students.[50]

Despite the diversifying landscape of AIDS, the traditional narratives of prostitution, promiscuity, sexual orientation (homosexuality), drug (ab)use, and race or conveniently folded in together to construct the penultimate site of erotic danger, as if to contain the threat of *dis*-ease beyond the limited and identifiable racial, sexual and geographical boundaries.[51] Though I do not want to question at all the fact that HIV would certainly be highly prevalent among some of these groups, the ways in which this site of danger functions as an over-investment of *dis*-ease conveniently displaces some other startling revelations.

The *Gazette* chose not to follow this article up with a detailed discussion of *other* factors that might have caused the unusually high rates of HIV at this particular "Gay Village" clinic in particular and in the province of Quebec in general, content with assuming it as an inevitable and resultant effect of geography (and all that is signified by this locale). The *Globe and Mail*, on the other hand, offered a follow-up article to these "facts." Entitled "Top AIDS doctor critical of Colleagues,"[52] the article cited comments submitted at the Krever Commission by Dr. Rejean Thomas of l'Actuel Clinic in Montreal. It is particularly interesting that these comments were never covered by the *Gazette*, given that this is of pertinent local interest to the readership served by that newspaper. Dr. Thomas argued that there is a long history in Quebec of referring potential carriers of HIV to the Red Cross

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[50] *Gazette* (26 Sept. 94/A2).

[51] One of the recommendations of the interim report of the Krever Commission is that "Blood-donor clinics should no longer be held in areas where infection rate with AIDS [sic] or other transmissible diseases is well above average" (*Globe and Mail* 25 Feb. 95/A7), a recommendation I cannot necessarily contest but which resonates with the above comments.

[52] *Globe and Mail* (28 Sept. 94 A4).

blood clinics for testing, because doctors simply do not know where else to send them, "a dangerous practice as a striking example of ignorance in the medical profession a generation after the AIDS epidemic hit Canada," and "a practice that could explain in part why the number of donors testing positive for HIV in Quebec was twice the national average." Similarly, a spokesman for the Montreal AIDS Resource Centre (David Cassidy) cited lack of education and cooperation from the Red Cross and public health officials for these unusually high numbers (rather than the linear notion of "hostility from high-risk groups" offered by the *Gazette*), suggesting the sensitive nature of the historic events by arguing that: "gay men were particularly miffed that the Red Cross singled them out as high-risk blood donors without first approaching community leaders to determine how the sensitive issue was to be broached."

In addition to the "tainted-blood scandal," the Red Cross faced yet another "scandal," this time prompted by university groups across Canada that were angered by the so-called screening process of the Red Cross, which bans *all* homosexuals and immigrants from countries where AIDS is a common disease from donating blood.[53] Three questions in particular became the subject of public controversy: In a rather broad interpretation and implementation of "risk management," The Red Cross screens out (1) *all* donors who have engaged in homosexual sex since 1977; (2) *all* donors who were born or emigrated from a country since 1977 where AIDS is common; and (3) *all* donors who have traveled to one of these countries since 1977.

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[53]In addition to the controversy on university campuses last year, "In January [1995], a gay man in Saskatoon complained to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, charging that the question [about male-male intercourse] is discriminatory" ("Red Cross under fire from gays," *Globe and Mail* 20 Feb. 95 A4).
As if to underscore yet again a panic logic, in April of 1995 The Red Cross shut down *all* blood donor clinics in Conception Bay North, Newfoundland, because of "high HIV rates" in the area. Of the 156 known cases of HIV-infection in the province of Newfoundland, 41 are from Conception Bay North, the highest rate in the country. Though the region has a population of 27,000, all clinics were shut down because, "Since 1990, there have been 32 women [. . .] and nine men from the region who have tested positive for HIV. . . By comparison, 150 people throughout the province were found to be HIV-positive, including 47 who have AIDS" (*Globe and Mail* 4 April 94/A7).

Not specifying what exactly constitutes "homosexual sex," the questionnaire, in the interests of safety, excludes *any* male who identifies as homosexual, regardless of the practices in which he engages. Rather than raising the fag-flag and inciting claims of homophobia, this issue resonates more interestingly with what Singer defines as the discrepancy between "paternalistic intervention" and "self regulation,"[54] effacing the very real behavioural changes that the gay community itself effectively implemented in the early years of the disease, that is, its ability to "regulate" itself in the interest of "safe(r)-sex" rather than being regulated by external social forces (like the calls for quarantining, mandatory HIV-testing, government imposed closure of gay bath houses, etc.). The disciplinary apparatus of the Red Cross for controlling bodies in the age of epidemic relies on this paternalistic intervention rather than self-regulation, constructing sites of danger not as constitutive of sexual practices but of community identity. This is not only a violence to the effective and ethical responsiveness the gay community has already demonstrated itself capable of, but rejects self-regulation with the result that other potential "tainted" donors might slip through the cracks of the paternalistic system.

Not only evidence of the volatile and sensitive nature of the AIDS epidemic, these questions in particular also underscore what Grosz has defined as the increasing administration and targeting of "marginalized groups" that functions to grant the heterosexual couple a form of "discursive privacy."[55] Against the implementation of self-regulation, nowhere, or at any time, is a bisexual or heterosexual woman asked if she has engaged in vaginal or anal intercourse without a condom, not in the recent past let alone since 1977. Given the demographics that heterosexual women are the fastest growing group becoming infected with HIV (at least in the West), there is a serious flaw in the Red Cross's logic, a logic that serves to displace *dis*-ease onto the body of the homosexual male

[54] Singer 67.
[55] Grosz 153.

subject, where it has always already been in the popular imaginary but where current demographics suggest it no longer exclusively belongs.

Though as a sexually active gay man who has never been tested for HIV and would thus never think of donating blood (if I were even permitted to), I am inclined to accept the notion that the nuclear family, in the age of epidemic, "is being repackaged as a prophylactic social device," a "vulgar expropriation of the call to 'safety' " which "implies that homosexuality is itself unsafe,"[56] to explain this logic than I am about Grosz's comments that it is especially the husband/father half of the reproductive heterosexual couple who is granted a form of "discursive privacy." While potent and engaging, I think Grosz's comments are perhaps less tenable at least in this particular case, since, in the Red Cross's questionnaire, it is clearly heterosexuality and not gender that serves as the criterion of purity versus danger in the age of epidemic.

Before moving on, I would like to return to the unprecedented legal move--the request for permission to identify the names of infected donors--to end this section with a further consideration of the potential legal ramification of the "tainted-blood scandal" *vis-à-vis* the cultural logic of *dis*-ease. In a *Globe and Mail* [57] editorial disagreeing with the ruling on this case, the question of whether or not "it is in the public interest that we know about everyone infected with HIV regardless of their being opposed to such public identification" is raised. To which is offered the following hypothetical scenario:

> If we can test a group of blood donors without their consent, why should we not bring in all those who have received transfusions of questionable blood and make them take the test? For that matter, why not test all gay men, who after all are the group most likely to contract and spread the disease? This need not stop with AIDS. Once we have said it is permissible to test blood for various things without donors' permission, the door is wide open. What, for instance, is to prevent health authorities from testing for genetic flaws that predispose individuals or their offspring to certain diseases. . . . Now that medical technology can reveal such things, medical privacy is more important than ever.

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[56] Butler, in Singer 8.

[57] "Tainted Blood and Violated Privacy," (*Globe and Mail* 14 Nov. 94/A14).

Similarly, a spokesman for the Canadian AIDS Society declares:

> The next time you give a urine sample to your insurance company, are they going to test you for AIDS [sic] without your consent ["mandatory" HIV testing is required for all new life-insurance policy applicants--though a rather dubious form of "consent" is required: get tested or you don't qualify].The next time you donate blood for a study on cholesterol, is someone going to come around later and test your blood for AIDS [sic]?[58]

Though I am inclined to position myself on the side of this *Globe and Mail* editorial and the arguments by the Canadian AIDS Society in their critiques of this particular ruling, I wish to offer the following questions for consideration: Why has AIDS elicited the kinds of responses quoted here? Are these prophecies and protestations themselves part of the panic logic spawned by AIDS in general and the discourse of "tainted-blood" in particular? Do they not also indicate the increasing production and intensification of regulation in the age of epidemic that bears no "rational" relation to the scenarios offered in the Krever Commission? Is this just idle speculation, some apocalyptic Orwellian prophecy of societal surveillance? We are, after all, only talking about five to sixteen individuals.

Indeed, this ruling provides a legal precedent that *could* have serious future repercussions. Then again, perhaps it could not. The only comment that I will make in reference to these counter-discursive narratives is that they are clearly articulated to provoke public fears and anxieties in a way that is similar to the resultant effects of the "tainted-blood scandal," with the only exception being that their political motivations are radically different, suggesting the serious social and legal implications that the cultural investments of *dis*-ease can elicit for political and moral configurations of AIDS.[59]

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[58]Douglas Elliot, qtd. in *Globe and Mail* (13 Oct. 94/A4).

[59]Amidst the coverage of the "tainted-blood scandal" was a recent motion by the Reform Party of Canada that went virtually unnoticed by the media, a motion demanding mandatory HIV testing for all potential immigrants to Canada that was supported by 20 Liberal MPs and defeated by only 36 votes (because many Liberal and BQ MPs failed to show up to vote down the measure). Liberal MP Reg Alcock argued that the motion "was pandering to every nasty instinct people have. Simply to victimize groups for cheap short-term headlines is irresponsible." But Reform Immigration Critic Art Hanger from Calgary insisted that "the motion was designed to prevent needlessly increasing the spread of AIDS in Canada and to save the public health system big expenditures to care for AIDS afflicted immigrants.'[. . .] To say we need not test would-be immigrants for HIV because it is not contagious is either the height of semantic stupidity or is political correctness that could cost hundreds if not thousands of lives and untold millions of dollars." All 32 Reform

To return, then, to the second motif offered by Singer--the familial structure of desire and the perceived threat AIDS poses to it--is to broach the following questions: What exactly is so *scandalous* about the "tainted-blood scandal"? And whose pleasure and power are served by the narrative framing of AIDS as a "scandal"? To suggest a response to this question of "scandal," I turn first not to Singer but to Watney, who, in his seminal and extensive analysis of AIDS in the media, highlights, as Singer does, the connection between "scandal" and the role and function of the normative and coherent social body in AIDS discourse, offering potent strategies for an analysis of the discourse of "tainted-blood." Watney writes:

> scandal serves the purpose of exemplary exclusion in newspaper discourse, and is the central means whereby readers find themselves reassured and reconciled as "normal," "law-abiding" citizens. [. . .] The[ ] fixed categories of gender, race, class, sexuality and national identity, and all their myriad derivations, are orchestrated together in order to protect readers from the actual diversity of social and sexual life, which it is also the business of the press stridently to denounce as immoral, indecent and unnatural. Thus *the "scandalous" is firmly structured as that which transgresses against the coherence of one or more of these categories*, that which flouts their validity and must therefore be exposed.[60]

As stated in the opening of this chapter, AIDS discourse and the social symbolic relations that facilitate its utterance is indissolubly linked to notions of liminality, the transgression of coherence, of borders, of order in general. Not only does Watney's polemic here resonate with Singer, it also has striking implications for the discursive frameworks of order/disorder, purity/danger, clean/proper, etc. skillfully outlined by Douglas and reinterpreted by Grosz. For the cultural investment in the sexual economy of the familial ideal of the procreative couple, and the ways in which that ideal is representative of both the coherence of the social body and of its potential transgressions, is, I would argue, the constitutive site for the articulation and conferral of that which is "scandalous" about the "tainted-blood scandal."

MPs present voted in favour of the motion. (Cf.: "20 Liberal MPs back reform bid to test immigrants for AIDS virus[sic]", *Gazette* 1 Nov. 94).

[60]Watney, *Policing Desire* 84-85; (italics added).

As stated in the introduction, Singer maintains that the current panic logic functions such that the nuclear family is constructed as the exemplary site of "health" and "safety" in an age of epidemic (or, in the words of Douglas, as a site of "purity" in an age of "danger"), suggesting that "over and against the construction of 'high-risk' or dangerous sex, there is the production of the family as the exemplar of sexual safety and health."[61] On the surface, however, the "tainted-blood scandal" is not about sex at all, since infection by transfused blood is removed from the realm of the "erotic" that would constitute the usual investments of danger. And, in contrast to Singer's hypothesis, the nuclear family can no longer be constructed as a unit of health and safety, of purity in times of danger, for the "tainted-blood scandal" as an unstable signifier disrupts the illusion of "discursive privacy" that the nuclear family has for the most part been accorded in this epidemic. That, alas, is what renders the "tainted-blood scandal" so *scandalous*, what makes the tragedy that much more tragic. "Scandal" does not signify as much questions of competence on the part of the Red Cross as it does the specific articulation that the boundaries of the social body have been subjected to transgression, destabalization, and to liminality in a way that is often denied in the popular perceptions of the AIDS epidemic.

Although it is a "scandal" ostensibly "about" the plight inflicted on certain *individuals* infected with HIV through blood and blood product transfusions, the discourses structuring this "epidemic" (here I mean the blood "epidemic" as a proliferation of "epidemic" conditions spawned by AIDS) rely on notions of familialism, where individuals are called upon to tell their stories in such a way as to elicit and affirm an identifactory relationship with the coherent social body characterized and signified by the familial norm, the procreative heterosexual couple. In a manner strikingly consistent with Douglas's polemic, the discourse of "tainted-blood" asserts that "public rituals enacted on the human body are taken to express personal and private concerns,"[62] where the public

[61]Butler, in Singer 7.
[62]Douglas 115.

body of AIDS and the ritual of the exchange of bodily fluids function to articulate the personal and private concerns of the heterosexual couple.

Moreover, though the coverage of the "tainted-blood scandal" is almost never explicit in articulating those sites of erotic danger from whom protection is required, the potency of the familial ideal to elicit "scandal" serves to implicate and reinscribe AIDS once again into the preexisting sexual economy and representational system of homosexuality. As a constitutive exclusion, the signification offered by the clandestine body of homosexuality as the usual site for erotic danger in the age of AIDS is always already present *vis-à-vis* an AIDS narrative, underscoring again the power of discourse and its reiterative potential to exclude homosexuality from systems of signification y always already rearticulate it *within* that system. Even in the context of AIDS, and its indissoluble connection to homosexuality, the heterosexual couple remains the pivot and frame of reference for these "Other" sexualities.

It is quite telling to discover that in not one account of these events at the Krever Commission in the popular press that I have read[63] are we ever witness to a so-called "victim" of "tainted-blood" who does not belong in some shape or form to the ideal represented by the heterosexual and/or reproductive couple. In the September 19, 94 issue of *Maclean's* magazine, for example, the cover story, entitled "BAD BLOOD? Is Canada's Supply Really Safe?," provides a summary of the events that led to the infected blood products and the recently established Krever Commission, including a comparison of American and Canadian safety standards. The graphics on the cover show a vial of blood tipped over and spilling across the page's ominous "BAD BLOOD" header, as if to underscore that this "scandal" is indeed about the transgression of the boundaries that are at the symbolic centre of AIDS discourse. And, as all good AIDS-journalists know, any "factual" story about AIDS should for full effect conclude with a journalistic "human

[63] I have researched every single publication of several Canadian dailies (specifically the *Globe and Mail* and the Montreal *Gazette*) from September of 1994 to the present day.

interest story," underscoring the "scandal" and tragedy in a way that statistics and quotations from government bureaucrats could never elicit. Thus, the article in *Maclean's* concludes with a piece rather predictably entitled "Voices of the Victims," the story of the Halifax, Nova Scotia couple Randy and Janet Connors, who were both infected with HIV when Randy received a blood transfusion in 1986 and subsequently infected his wife. The article is accompanied by the requisite photo of the couple, a moving rendition of their "victimization," clutching each other for comfort as they gaze melancholically away from the lens of the camera in mock contemplation of their certain destiny (the photo is no doubt posed, as the Connors sit well-dressed on the dirty ground in what appears to be a field of some sort). The article begins with the plaintive: "They told stories of acute pain, personal devastation and incredible courage. Randy Connors [. . .] seemed to be speaking for all the victims when he bluntly told the inquiry: 'It's just plain murder what they [the Red Cross] did, giving out a product that they know is going to kill you.' "[64]

More than just a manifestation of the ways in which "scandal" is elicited at the site of the heterosexual couple, the power of the cultural and social responses to the AIDS epidemic extends itself into the legal domain, spilling into other discourses and sites of investment much like the vial of blood that spills across the page and threatens the very social order itself. For not only were the Connors "victims" of "tainted-blood," they were also activists who fought for compensation from their provincial government for those like themselves who were infected with HIV as a result of blood and blood product transfusions. They fought, and they won, convincing the provincial government to award

> $30,000 a year for life to every Nova Scotian suffering AIDS [and those who are infected with HIV, a distinction the article fails to note] because of blood-product transfusions and to every spouse or child they infect. The province will also pay for AIDS drugs for eligible families, some life insurance and funeral costs, *and four years of post-secondary education for the children.*"[65]

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[64]As Watney has written: "How many times does one have to inform a professional science correspondent [. . .] that people with AIDS are only 'victims' of predatory journalists?" (*Policing Desire* 34). Also, Watney writes: "AIDS reportage tells us far more about journalism than it does about AIDS" (80).

[65]*Globe and Mail* (15 Sept. 94/A6; italics added).

Though the rest of the country did not follow suit, offering instead a "Multi-Territorial Assistance Program"[66] that compensates only those *directly* infected by blood products, the implications here are illuminating in terms of the over-investment of the familial economy and the resultant displacement of the "Other." If indeed the Red Cross and the government were guilty of negligence and mismanagement (which it appears they were), then one would be hard pressed to argue against some form of compensation. And I do not wish at all to contest or to support such claims. What is not hard to contest, however, and what is not easy to support, is the ways in which the family is figured as both the exclusive site of vulnerability and the only social-sexual configuration worthy of compensation, over and above the possibility of any other scenario (at least as it is presented in the popular imaginary). Why should we as a society goes as far as to supply "four years of post-secondary education for the children" of those infected (even if, as the article does not make clear, these children were themselves not infected but are the offspring of those who were),[67]when no compensation has ever been given or any apologies ever made to the thousands of gay men and IV drug users who were similarly infected because of government negligence, inaction, and indifference?

Remaining within the context of this present "scandal," imagine the public outcry that would ensue if a sexually monogamous hemophiliac infected through a blood transfusion who also happens to be gay attempted to convince the government and society that he was a "victim" of "tainted-blood," and should, therefore, be compensated for injuries incurred; or imagine that that same gay man infected with HIV through a blood transfusion infected his monogamous partner of twenty years. What difficulty he would have in convincing the popular imaginary that he was infected not because he himself represents a site of erotic danger, not because he was "irresponsible" in protecting *himself*,

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[66]*Globe and Mail* (7 Nov. 94).

[67]"One of the important functions of the family is certainly to manage the reproductive consequences of the substitutability of bodies, by establishing legally recognized structures of property relations designed to link offspring with their progenitors" (Singer 78).

but because he was one of those unfortunate enough to have been a casualty of government negligence and an over-wrought bureaucratic system, or the partner of one of those individuals. Or imagine for a moment the possibility of a common-law heterosexual couple in the same situation as the Connors with the exception of a marriage certificate fighting for compensation. If we are going to give four years of post-secondary education to the children of those infected, why not goes as far as to compensate every single sexual partner of those people infected by "tainted-blood," even, and especially, if they fall outside the parametres of the matrimonial bond? Given their penchant and skill for the tracing of avenues of infection, the government, it seems, would be up to such an impossible task.

Clearly it is incomprehensible that we as a society could compensate or even imagine the possibility that there might be people involved-*other* than those who subscribe to the marital norm. The cultural logic of *dis*-ease could not and will not tolerate such paradoxes and seeming contradictions. Though it is not inconceivable that such scenarios could and probably did occur, it is almost impossible to expect the legal community or the Canadian federal and provincial governments or the Red Cross or the media or even the Connors to conjure up such scenarios for the public imaginary. The convenient cultural conflation of homosexuality as always already identifiable (and therefore equivalent) with AIDS displaces these possibilities, as does the over-investment of the family and the sanctity offered to the marital couple displaces the possibility for the cultural valorization of practices of heterosexuality that are outside the matrimonial bond. The families of those infected are being compensated because their sexuality and sexual practices are assumed to be containable; that is, the phantasmatic faith in the coherency of the social body of the heterosexual couple assumes that avenues of infection can be determined *vis-à-vis* the ostensibly monogamous bond of the marriage certificate in a way that other sexual configurations could not. The family here then is figured as a site of over-investment whose social rights and cultural privileges provide the pivot and frame of reference for articulating that which is scandalous and for determining the course of the legal rights and

responsibilities that frame the debates about AIDS. Thus, it is the family unit, and not the immune system, that is figured as under threat by AIDS, to the complete exclusion of all other possible sites of vulnerability. As Foucault writes on the very first page of *The History of Sexuality*: "The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law."[68]

Scattered throughout the coverage of the death of Randy Connors and his wife's success in the compensation fight, we are given little snippets of their subscription to the values of domesticity. In addition to the *Maclean's* article, the *Globe and Mail* has written:

> The stalwart widow of AIDS activist Randy Connors said her partner gave her one of the last gifts that she will carry with her the rest of her days [the article holds off for a couple of lines to inform the reader that this gift is not the deadly virus that the opening line sets us up for]. Mr. Connors traveled to Toronto, where he told a federal inquiry that those responsible for allowing Canadians to receive tainted blood should be jailed. He said guilt from infecting his wife was almost more than he could bear. His last words on Tuesday: "Janet, I'm sorry, I love you." [69]

With typical journalistic flourish, the article follows these words up with the quaint and plaintive: "Mr. Connors slipped into a coma and died several hours later." And as if to restore some dignity to this man's life, given the "shame" associated with dying of AIDS,[70] we are told that:

> He was surrounded in the home he loved by his wife, two sisters and his parents. His teen-aged son, Angus, could not be there. "It was so important to him to know that *the home was safe* for Gus and I," Mrs. Connors said. "And on July 13, *we paid off the mortgage.*"[71]

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[68] *The History of Sexuality* 3.

[69] *Globe and Mail* (15 Sept. 94/A6).

[70] A recent episode of the day-time talk-show "Shirley" (CTV February 1, 1995) about people falsely diagnosed with HIV, in which one guest declared that he'd "rather be dead than live with AIDS," was considered by host Shirley Solomon herself to be one the "saddest and most tragic" shows she had ever done, apparently not because these people *had* AIDS but because, in fact, they *didn't*. The false diagnoses that threatened to destroy marriages and families elicited an unfathomable amount of horror and disbelief from the audience, again not because of anxiety about uncertain tests results or the limitations of science, but because of the continued stigma and shame these people assumed to be carrying for having a disease which in reality they did not have. An HIV/AIDS counselor rightly suggested that we not get too hysterical about false positives and urged these people to get on with their lives.

[71] *Globe and Mail* (15 Sept. 94, A6).

The conflation of the heterosexual norm and/as the site of sexual and economic investment ("we paid off the mortgage") in relations of exchange attempts the recuperation of a sense of order in the face of the disorderliness of AIDS.

In addition to their success in the fight for government compensation packages, "The couple received a human-rights award last year for their work in raising awareness about AIDS;" and after Ottawa agreed to a $139 million package for the 1000 hemophiliacs, "Four major drug companies added $17 million to the package inspired by Mr. Connors;"[72] while thousands of gay men, drug users, and urban poor die prematurely as a direct result of lack of resources and access to the "beneficent effects of power" (Singer) that such familial over-investments displace.

At the same time as the media coverage of "the tainted-blood scandal" and the death of Randy Connors, an AIDS-related death in the United States prompted similar responses. In their coverage of the death of Elizabeth Glaser in California, one newspaper referred to her as a "Hollywood wife" first and then an "AIDS activist" second,[73] circumscribing her within a familial framework and thus setting up the necessary conditions for "scandal" that will make her story poignantly "tragic." Glaser prompted international attention not only because she was the "Hollywood wife" of actor Paul Michael Glaser (of *Starsky and Hutch* fame), but also because she infected both of her children, Ariel and Jake. Such was the enormity of her plight that top government officials stood up and took notice of her death, and, consequently, of AIDS, spurred on, no doubt, by the perceived threat to the American nuclear family that has been a constant source of political provocation both in the Bush and now Clinton administrations. So inspirational was her tragic story that President Bill Clinton himself urged the American public to "honour her memory by finishing the work to which she gave everything she had. Elizabeth confronted the challenge of AIDS in her own life and lost her beloved daughter to AIDS at a time when our government and our country

[72] *Globe and Mail* (15 Sept. 94/A6).
[73] *Globe and Mail* (5 Dec. 94/C5).

were too indifferent to this illness and the people who had it."[74] Clinton is referring here to Glaser's work on the Pediatric AIDS Foundation, which earned her a presidential citation from first-lady Hillary Rodham-Clinton.

The over-investment of this mother's tragic death--and her child's--displaces the untenable nature of her "story," configuring the "mother" as symbolic divine protectress of the familial economy--the "family romance" and the "pleasures of maternity"[75]-- despite the impossibly of her claims:

> In *1981*, when Mrs. Glaser was nine months pregnant with Ariel, her first child, she began bleeding and was rushed to hospital in Los Angeles, where she was given seven pints of blood. The baby was delivered successfully. *Three weeks later*, Mrs. Glaser read a newspaper article telling of the dangers of contracting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, from blood transfusions. She said her doctor *reassured* her and she was not tested for the virus.[76]

In 1981, however, only a handful of cases of what we *now* call AIDS had been seen, and a test for HIV was several years away. The Center For Disease Control [CDC] in Atlanta issued a warning on November 5, 1982, when there were only eight cases of AIDS known to have been transmitted through the transfusion of HIV-infected blood products. The virus as such wasn't even identified until 1983, yet we are offered here a scenario by Glaser herself and uncontested by the media of a mother seeking protection for her family from a virus that she could not have possibly known about. The "facts" about AIDS are displaced in this narrative in preference for maintaining the virtues of the familial bond, eliciting consensus about the tragic nature of this story in a way that perhaps tells us more about the cultural investments of the family than it does about the historic unfolding of the AIDS epidemic.

As I have tried to implicitly suggest throughout this chapter, the cultural circulation of a discourse of "tainted-blood"--and the inscription of all that is here signified by such a phrase *vis-à-vis* the configuration of "scandal"--might have implications for the

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[74] *Globe and Mail* (5 Dec. 94/C5).
[75] Singer 79.
[76] *Globe and Mail* (5 Dec. 94/C5; italics added).

consideration not just of media phenomenon in an information age, but also for a consideration of the phenomenon of social symbolic relations in the era of AIDS. To conclude this chapter, and to treat the latter phenomenon more explicitly, is to broach the following obvious question raised at the start: What social and cultural mechanisms are currently in place that would allow the circulation of a discourse of "tainted-blood" in the first place, especially and most obviously given the proximity of AIDS to the socially stigmatized yet rarely spoken field of homosexuality? To offer a not so obvious answer, I return again to Douglas. For if we are to assume that, as Douglas has argued, "pollution" or "dirt" is matter that is out of place, and that that form of matter which constitutes "danger" can only be articulated where there are clearly delimited lines of structure,[77] what then might this polemic offer for a consideration of "tainted-blood," most significantly in relation to notions of the structure of the body, of its borders and its limits, and the lived experience of the body by which these borders and limits are constituted?

Writing in 1966, Douglas argues:

> I believe that ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created.[78]

> The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The function of its different parts and their relations afford a source of symbols for other complex structures.[79]

Throughout the discourse of "tainted-blood" and the Krever Commission on the Red Cross, it is relentlessly evident that, on a material level, "scandal" serves for the articulation of a system inherently out of order, a bureaucratic nightmare of inefficiency and lack of

[77]Douglas 113; Cf.: passage from the opening of this chapter.
[78]Douglas 4.
[79]Douglas 115.

resources.[80] But in addition to this literal level, the "tainted-blood scandal," as a manifestation of the disorderliness of "an untidy experience," is, perhaps, more about the social order and the configurations of the body in the age of AIDS than it is about the inefficiency of bureaucratic systems or the limitations of science. The ways in which the social body can stand as a representation of any bounded system beyond the literal to signify a whole set of social symbolic relations, the ways in which it can function as a source of symbols for other complex structures, could be more readily understood if we were to consider "tainted-blood" as "dirt, " as matter inherently out of place. Building on Douglas's text, Grosz has argued that:

> Dirt signals a site of possible danger to social and individual systems, a site of vulnerability insofar as the status of dirt as marginal and unincorporable always locates sites of threat to the system and to the order it both makes possible and problematizes.[81]

The punitive effects of power and discourse--that is, the attempt to impose a sense of order to the system that has been transgressed, while also displacing the anxieties that erupt at the sites of these transgressions--suggest that the cultural and social significations of "tainted-blood" function as the representation of difference for the stabilization of those binary configurations: Self/Other, inside/outside, order/disorder, clean/dirty, contaminated/ contaminating, closed/open, cleansing/polluting, unpenetrable/penetrated, etc., to reestablish a sense of order to social and symbolic systems of the body in the age of AIDS. Consistent with the notion of the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomenon it seeks to control, the ways in which "power regimes are themselves formed and sustained through certain erasures [and] constitutive exclusions," where certain bodies are paradoxically "marked as both outside *and* constitutive"[82]of these social formations, "tainted-blood" rearticulates AIDS within a homosexual economy yet always already

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[80]One need only hear the chain of command at the heart of Canada's blood system to realize what an over-wrought bureaucracy it indeed is: The Canadian Blood Agency, a joint provincial and territorial agency, finances the system; the Red Cross runs it; and the Bureau of Biologics (!) sets the regulations and "polices" the system.

[81]Grosz 192.

[82]Butler, in Singer 4.

excludes homosexuality from these formations. To be sure, one need only ask the simple questions: "Tainted" by what, and by whom?[83]

Again, interpreting Douglas's influential text, Grosz has stated that:

> Douglas is [. . .] right in claiming that we live our sexual bodies, our body fluids and their particular forms of jouissance or tension, never as it were "in the raw," unmediated by cultural representation. Our pleasures and anxieties are always lived and experienced through models, images, representations, and expectations. Those regulating and contextualizing the body and its pleasures have thus far in our cultural history established models which do not regard the polluting contamination of sexual bodies as a two-way process, in which each affects or infiltrates the other.[84]

Grosz is concerned here with the ways in which different body types are produced in and through the different sexual and cultural practices undertaken, a concern that suggests the potency of discourse to signify social structures, and for the social inscription of the body for the rearticulation of dominant cultural values. If we live our sexual bodies (and, more importantly here, our body fluids) through the mediation of cultural representation, and inversely, if we mediate those cultural representations through the lived experience of the body, it is not insignificant and not surprising that the transmission or exchange of blood from the marginal body of AIDS into the coherent social body would elicit the significations associated with the very notion of "tainted" fluids, especially if we considered that other fluids with the potential to harbour and transmit viral infection have *not* been framed in this way: we do not talk about "tainted" semen or "tainted" vaginal fluid; nor do we talk about "tainted" blood in the context of sites of infection associated with intravenous drug use. To talk of "tainting" in these situations would be to consciously thwart a semblance of order, where in fact these fluid exchanges serve to offer AIDS as a stable signifier, the result of the lived experience of the marginal bodies and their bodily

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[83]In a recent newspaper article, "Hemophiliacs not warned about blood from San Francisco," the answer to this question is explicitly addressed: "The Red Cross did not warn hemophiliacs in 1985 that they had been given vials of potentially lethal blood from San Francisco, the AIDS [and Gay] capital of North America" (*Globe and Mail* 17 My, 1995/A19). This is one of the few examples where the discourses of the Krever Commission explicitly acknowledge gay men as the donors of HIV-infected blood. The media is usually more cautious than this, though the connection is always implicitly present.

[84]Grosz 196-197.

fluids that allows for both the conferral of that which is not a "scandal," not "tainted," and also for that which is. As a manifestation of "dirt," the "tainted-blood scandal" and the social symbolic relations that permit its utterance, suggest that those "bodily processes construed or constituted as marginal [. . .] are readily able to function as loci for the representation of social and collective anxieties."[85]

Grosz writes: "Perhaps it is not after all flow in itself that a certain phallicized masculinity abhors but the idea that flow moves or can move in two-way or indeterminable directions" characteristic of gay male sexuality, in opposition to the heterosexual man, whose sexuality constitutes a "sealed-up, impermeable body."[86] If we are to assume Grosz's thesis about the roots of "homophobia" and the eliciting of "horror" gay male sexual practices can elicit, then the discourse of "tainted-blood" is, I would argue, already deeply invested within a homophobic discourse, since we are talking about a literal manifestation of the idea that flow can move in an indeterminable way that has certainly elicited horror ("scandal") in the popular responses to "tainted-blood." But consistent with the paradoxical nature of power, and of *dis*-ease, "scandal" serves the effective displacement of that potential two way flow, denying the possibility that flow can move not only to the site of the heterosexual couple, but to other sites of vulnerability as well, a "category crisis" of flow that has threatened the coherency of the entire social body, marked it as liminal in a way that it has always refused to be.[87]

Ultimately, of course, the misplaced (displaced) social priorities that render "scandal" are a matter of subjective experience and personal location: for *I* find it equally

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[85]Grosz 196.

[86]Grosz 201.

[87]Foucault has argued that "for a society in which famine, epidemics, and violence made death imminent, blood constituted one of the fundamental values. It owed its high value at the same time to its instrumental role, [. . .] to the way it functioned in the order of signs. [. . .] A society of blood [. . .] where power spoke *through* blood. [. . .] blood was *a reality with a symbolic function*" (*The History of Sexuality* 147.) Foucault argues that this "symbolics of blood" transformed to the modern "analytics of sexuality," marked by the shift to mechanisms of power exerting forces on bodies, pleasures, etc. But we are again in an age of "epidemic," where power is in part spoken through the symbolic function of blood. These tidy, coherent epistemic shifts are not always as tenable as Foucault suggests, which accounts in part for his many detractors.

scandalous that people are being infected every day with this virus yet we cannot talk frankly about safe(r) sex and condoms in our schools;[88] *I* find it equally scandalous that the former United States Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders was recently fired by President Clinton for arguing that masturbation is a valid form of sexual pleasure and should be promoted in the educational system;[89] and *I* find it equally scandalous that Nova Scotian Liberal MP Roseanne Skoke is a Member of Parliament.[90] None of these scenarios are figured as scandalous the way the "tainted-blood scandal" has been. None of these scenarios transgress boundaries the way this has.

Within the cultural logics of the current sexual economy of exchange, to move outside the narrative framing of AIDS in this instance as scandalous would be "to threaten that exchange relation with a radical and unassimilable contestation of authority, a break in the founding relation of exchange" that Singer calls "a rupture."[91] A rupture, perhaps, of

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[88]In a *Gazette* feature article, entitled "Are we doing teenagers more harm than good in teaching them how to have sex--even so-called 'safe sex'--rather than trying to get them to understand and control their adolescent impulses?," public-health "expert" Kristine Napier (who is also the chair of the board of the "Responsible Social Values Program" in the United States) argued: "I have come to the conclusion that we do more harm than good in introducing our kids to sexually explicit material and teaching them the mechanics of how to be sexually active. Parents have naively acquiesced to the concept of 'safe sex,' driven first by an acceptance of the widespread belief that 'all kids are going to become sexually active' and then by an intense fear of sexually transmitted AIDS [sic]. But as parents, we don't have to accept the world we suddenly find ourselves in: a world that has forgotten the merits of teaching kids the tried and true concept of abstinence. We no longer have to put our children's health in jeopardy--as I believe we do when we accept the fallacious concept of 'safe sex.' Abstinence is not simply a moral issue. It can mean the difference between life and death." Some "expert!" By denying the reality of the "world we suddenly find ourselves in," this health "expert" is doing just the opposite of what she intends: putting children's health at risk in a sexual economy more problematic than anything this woman's pre-AIDS mentality could possibly understand. (*Gazette* 17 Aug. 1994/B3).

[89]She has also been quoted as saying that "Good parents are good parents--regardless of their sexual orientation. It's clear that the sexual orientation of parents has nothing to do with the sexual orientation or outlook of their children," (qtd. in The *Advocate* January 24, 1995) a statement we might expect to cause some anxiety for the former Republican Bush/Quayle administration, but which is wholly disconcerting to hear about a woman fired by the Democrat Clinton (who ostensibly represents a new era in American politics, summed up, for example, by Barbra Streisand in her New York City concert when she over-stepped the bounds of entertainment and good taste and dedicated "Happy Days Are Here Again" to the current administration).

[90]Her fierce crusade against gay rights in Ottawa has provoked such public statements like "homosexuality is an inhuman act that defiles humanity, destroys families and is annihilating mankind;" "Canada exists to serve families"; and "Families have inherent and inviolable rights" (Cf.: "Storming the Ramparts," *Maclean's* November 28, 1994: 31, 32). We know exactly what Skoke is referring to here when she invokes religious fundamentalist-inspired apocalyptic scenarios of the annihilation of mankind, and therefore the conflation of AIDS and/as homosexuality remains the unspoken yet potent site for the justification of her bigoted and hateful diatribes.

[91]Butler, in Singer 4.

the social order itself, a rupture that, the discourse of "tainted-blood" makes clear, is not possible at this historic moment in the AIDS epidemic.

But this, though: death,

the whole of death,--even before life's begun,

to hold it all so gently, and be good:

this is beyond description!

--Rainer Maria Rilke

CHAPTER TWO:

"EVERY PROBLEM HAS A SOLUTION:"

AIDS, HOMOSEXUALITY, AND THE CULTURAL RECUPERATION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM IN *PHILADELPHIA*[*]

> To analyse the political investment of the body [. . .] [o]ne would be concerned with the "body politic," as a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge.
>
> --Michel Foucault[92]

> I kept trying to pump it up for the shopping malls.
>
> --Director Jonathan Demme, on *Philadelphia*[93]

In the preceding chapter, I attempted to demonstrated how, under the cultural logic of *dis*-ease, the over-investment of the familial economy functions as the site for the articulation of that which is "scandalous" about AIDS, and that this over-investment displaces other concerns, anxieties, and fears disproportionately in need of address in this epidemic. In the following chapter, I will continue to explore the investments of the familial/heterosexual couple in AIDS discourse, specifically as it is configured through the representation of the clandestine homosexual body of AIDS (as "Other") in Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia* (1993). Unlike the "tainted-blood scandal," the cultural construction of AIDS at the site of the homosexual body offers AIDS a stable and coherent signifier. But even in this, the seeming conferral for addressing these "Other" concerns, the cultural logic of *dis*-ease, I will argue, negotiates the representation of difference as strategy of displacement of this very "otherness."

To begin this chapter with the intersection of Foucault's "body politic" and Demme's strategies for bringing homosexuality and AIDS to the big screen ("I kept trying

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[*] A version of this chapter appears under a similar title in *Spectator: Journal of Film and Television Criticism* Vol. 15, No. 1 (Fall 1994).

[92]Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 28.

[93]Jesse Green, "The 'Philadelphia' Experiment," *Premiere: The Movie Magazine* (January 1994): 60.

to pump it up for the shopping malls") is to suggest one way in which to situate a relatively recent phenomenon in popular cultural productions: the queer male body has become an "object of knowledge" (Foucault) in popular spaces for general consumption. It is also to suggest that the screen as a medium of communication is indeed a "support" in the power-knowledge relations that invest these queer bodies. The tendency toward cultural mastery in mainstream cinema in general--that is, the insistence on a simple dichotomous logic of good versus evil, liberal versus conservative, etc., and the need for clearly delimited problems with foreseeable and concrete solutions--assures that the spectacularized and clichéd images of gay men will persist. The impulse for narrative closure and the imposition of a singular and authoritative meaning in Hollywood cinema leave no space for epistemological and ontological uncertainty, constructing and sustaining a linear definition in the popular imaginary of what it "means" to be gay.

Where the queer male body in the age of AIDS is concerned, the pre-established representational system insists that we always already know the routes of HIV-infection (epistemological mastery): promiscuity; we always already know the fate of the queer male body as a result of its erotic treasons (ontological mastery): an unrestrained, unsatiated and sexually adventurous body that will end in early death. In my treatment of the film, I will argue that *Philadelphia* works along the lines of an established discursive formation of homosexuality in the age of AIDS: where the queer male body functions as "the body of the condemned"--as our one moment in the media spotlight confirms: the queer male body as always already AIDS-ridden, always already on the verge of death--and/or as incidental to the narrative structure of the text, negotiating difference not in order to inscribe our bodies with alternative paradigms of sexual pleasure but for the rearticulation of dominant value systems and social sexual configurations.

If, as much recent film theory argues, it is the male body that is the site for the playing out of narratives of difference in mainstream cinema,[94] then, under the cultural logic of *dis*-ease, these signifying practices will deploy "difference" (the homosexual body of AIDS) as a strategy of displacement, representing that which is culturally "Other" for the recuperation and consolidation of a "normative" model of masculinity, male sexuality, and by extension, the "American Dream." In short, to alleviate anxiety about AIDS, to move in the direction of "ease," while also reinscribing phantasmatic notions of sexuality in the age of AIDS. These strategies are effected, I will maintain, by foregrounding (though never acknowledging) representations of race and class repeatedly throughout *Philadelphia*, the repeated intersection of "other" social and cultural issues that will work to diffuse and displace the very subjects the film ostensibly addresses.

The form of *Philadelphia* is consistent with dominant representational and thematic practices in Hollywood film in general, where the importance of male homosocial bonds are highlighted, and where homophobia is situated in terms of male competition.[95] In *Philadelphia*, for example, male bonds are negotiated through the representation of the relationship between Beckett and his lawyer Joe Miller (the homophobic lawyer, played by Denzel Washington, who will take Beckett's case), and between Beckett and the other male colleagues at the law firm where Beckett works. In the logic of the male homosocial bond,

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[94]I am thinking specifically here of the work that has followed Laura Mulvey's influential text "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," (originally published in *Screen* in 1975) *Visual and Other Pleasures*, especially the work circulating around her phrase "the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification" (Mulvey 20). For example, several of the essays in Steve Cohen & Ina Rae Hark (eds.), *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema*, including Steve Neale's "Prologue: Masculinity as Spectacle," argue, taking the cue from Mulvey, that "in a heterosexual and patriarchal society, the male body cannot be marked explicitly as the erotic object of another male look: that look must be motivated in some other way, its erotic component repressed" (Neale 14). Neale argues in general that homosexuality and homoeroticism in mainstream cinema are displaced by foregrounding issues of race, class, and gender. Similarly, Cynthia J. Fuchs's essay "The Buddy Politic" (also in *Screening the Male*), on Hollywood action genre, "examine[s] efforts to efface homosexuality by recuperating racial otherness" (195) as it is worked through certain films as a "crisis of masculinity." Also of interest in this respect are Susan Jeffords's texts *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War*, and *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in The Reagan Era*.

[95]For an extended discussion of these issues, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*; Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America* and *Hard Bodies*; and the various essays in *Screening the Male*.

any reference to eroticism or same-sex desire, that is, any sexualization of these bonds, is taboo, serving to maintain and legitimize existing power structures shared between and among men. What is unique to *Philadelphia*, however, is the way in which this standard narrative form must be refurbished in order to allow the queer to die, a new twist on an older, established genre.[96]

Also, I will take as a critical focus a consideration of what is popularly called the "politics of representation" in terms of the reception of production (that is, an analysis of the film itself), and in terms of what I call the production of reception (that is, the media attention developing prior to the film's release and the subsequent discourses within which the film has been structured.) Of particular interest in this latter respect is the cultural construction in the mainstream imaginary of Tom Hanks (who plays Andrew Beckett, the gay lawyer who dies from complications due to AIDS) as the new "hero" or "spokesmodel" for the AIDS epidemic, an insidious signification beyond the parametres of the film itself. The para- and extra- textual publicity discourses that shape and support the film--the numerous articles and interviews in newspapers, magazines, and on television; the various artistic awards and subsequent victory speeches--all these endow the film with the potential for controversy prior to the film's release, while reinforcing the power-knowledge relations within which the homosexual body of AIDS is constructed. To valorize these cultural texts, then, is in part a refusal to divorce the film from the cultural context in which it is produced, and to make everything count as inscriptions of meaning and sites of knowledge in the discursive formation of AIDS.

That *Philadelphia* can be problematized in this way is not to suggest that we do not need or want mainstream representations that treat the experiences of gay men living with AIDS. We can not ignore the fact, however, that *Philadelphia* offers the only example in

[96]Also unique to *Philadelphia*, of course, is its "mainstream" appeal, and its *huge* box-office success. Films like *Parting Glances* (1986), *Longtime Companion* (1990), *Poison* (1991), *Les Nuits Fauves* (1993), *Zero Patience* (1993) and *The Living End* (1992), while having earned a certain amount of critical and economic success, were produced independently and/or are constructed within a less mainstream "art-house" tradition, and have thus not reached the audiences that *Philadelphia* has been able to reach.

mainstream cinema that features a gay man as its central character that is not an angst-ridden pathos-machine (*Making Love* [1982]), a flaming queen (*Kiss of the Spider Woman* [1985]), or a cross-dressing psychopath (*The Silence of the Lambs* [1991]). In other words, the role of Andrew Beckett in *Philadelphia* offers the only *central* gay character in mainstream cinema whose presentation is not overtly and excessively pathologized or spectacularized. Beckett is a homosexual who might--and does--"pass" for "straight".[97] The characterization of Beckett indicates the limitations (or, at this historic moment, the impossibility) of the representability of the non-pathologized or non-spectacularized homosexual outside the context of an AIDS narrative.

Many writers in the popular press have patently and offensively dismissed those who have been critical of the film's negotiation of AIDS, suggesting that it is simply *enough* that this film was even produced and distributed. This dismissal is achieved by dividing the gay community into two camps: those who might identify with the portrayal of a closeted homosexual like Hanks's character, and those of us who by virtue of our criticism are safely dismissed as the "radical fringe." Those involved in the production of *Philadelphia* "fully expected to receive some flack from the more militant gay groups for making the hero a closeted gay."[98] "The larger gay community, beyond the activists, will receive [the film] well because they are so starved for images."[99]

But the very fact such comments are being broached suggests that we have reached a turning-point in contemporary culture, a critical and historic moment that is both necessary and paradoxical: necessary because the unprecedented proliferation of texts treating the issues of homosexuality and now AIDS is a welcomed and much needed change in a milieu that has created and sustained the conditions of our silence; but

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[97]Obviously, there are numerous minor or supporting roles who fit this description, most recently, for example, the character of Eddy (Josh Charles) in *Threesome* (1994). I stress here the importance of Hanks's role as *lead* in the film, not a role that is casual, or even accidental, as in most Hollywood treatments of gay or lesbian characters.

[98]*Esquire* 80.

[99]Michelangelo Signorile, qtd. in *Esquire* 80.

paradoxical too, because, while difference conceived as queer has the potential to generate capital, it still remains a discursive, problematic and hotly contested field for production and reception in popular communicative spaces.[100] The paradox is only increased when we consider the commercial success of *Philadelphia* yet know that there is still a shroud of silence surrounding AIDS. What social and cultural mechanisms are currently in place that would allow a mainstream film like *Philadelphia* to achieve both commercial and artistic success while the public is still promoting the negation of AIDS's existence beyond the gay community?

Demme himself has said that he was looking for a story and a way to "handle" the issues that would strike a "universal appeal," a something-in-it-for-everyone that would make it an easy sell for the "shopping malls." More telling is Tri-Star President's (Marc Platt) definition of "universal appeal:" what they were really searching for was "points of access for individuals not in contact with the gay community and this disease,"[101] a gesture that guarantees the displacement of homosexuality under the logic of *dis*-ease. In light of such comments, can we assume that *Philadelphia* represents a genuine shift in sexual and cultural paradigms, or should it serve as a disturbing moment when the forces of commerce and Eros are in struggle? Does commercial success necessarily indicate "political" success,[102] or should one be more circumspect and argue that this is an example

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[100]For example: a recent issue of *Roseanne* (ABC), in which lead character Roseanne Connor visits a gay bar and kisses another woman (Mariel Hemingway) on the lips, was initially rejected by ABC Entertainment executives. With threats from Roseanne herself to pull her show from the network (thus risking the loss of huge advertising revenues for ABC), ABC executives allowed the show to air (ABC March 1, 1994). It was the highest rated episode in the history of the show. Similarly, the six-hour PBS adaptation of Armisted Maupin's *Tales of the City* was the highest rated program on PBS in over a decade. With plans for a sequel in the works, PBS decided to pull out their funding and cancel the series. It seems that PBS was less concerned about money than about the pressure from the Right to ban the sequel *More Tales of the City*. Cf.: Steve Greenberg, "No More Tales," *The Advocate* (May 31 1994) 56-58; 60.
For an excellent discussion of the question of visibility in queer politics, see Bersani's recent text *Homos*.

[101]*Esquire* 80.

[102]"AIDS provided an occasion for the cost-benefit logic in which sexuality had been constituted as the sphere of primary satisfaction to become an explicit articulation. It is not that sex has not always had its price. It is just that in the age of sexual epidemic, which is also the age of late capitalism, the joint efforts of the commodity system, the medical profession and the media have found a way to make that ideological construct profitable" (Singer 30). In addition to the cost-benefit analysis of such mediated texts like *Philadelphia*, the medical establishment has much to profit from preventing the development of a vaccine or cure for AIDS. "An AIDS vaccine is scientifically possible, but probably won't be created unless social

that "gayspace may be conceived as so fluid a realm of consumer possibility that it merges unconditionally with the reigning commercial ethos of the straight world, loses its distinctive queerness, and vanishes into the purgatorial strip malls of liberal 'tolerance' "?[103] These contradictions necessitate a critical appraisal of such representations, despite the dismissal of these appraisals in the popular responses to this film.

The commercial potential of AIDS has by now been demonstrated,[104] for, upon initial release, *Philadelphia* reached the position of top-grossing film, beating even *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993) and earning about 9.1 million dollars in its first month alone.[105] Not only was it a box-office hit, but also an artistic triumph, at least by Hollywood standards. Tom Hanks picked up a Golden Globe Award *and* the Academy Award for Best Actor for his portrayal of Beckett.[106] Similarly, Bruce Springsteen received an Academy Award for original song for "Streets of Philadelphia" (in which Springsteen, as songwriter, adopts the persona of a gay man in the midst of losing his self-identity at the hands of AIDS: "I was unrecognizable to myself"). And this year Neil Young won a (retrospective) Grammy for his contribution "Philadelphia." Should we be surprised at these signs that AIDS sells? Should we simply assume (and be grateful) that Hollywood has finally taken notice of the disease? Or should we take as a point of departure a consideration of the issues and identifications the film refuses to confront, declines to acknowledge, and to consider what gets prescribed as a consequence of the film's proscriptive practices?

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pressure can override the profit concerns of drug manufactures. [. . .] the private manufacturers who finance drug research stand to make more money through developing treatments for the disease than through finding a vaccine for it. Look at AZT [a drug which supposedly slows the onset of AIDS-related illnesses]. You take it four times a day for the rest of your life. With a vaccine, if its good, you'll take it maybe four times in your whole life" (Dr. Donald Francis; qtd. in *Globe and Mail* 10 March 95/A4).

[103]Miller, "Outscape" 78.

[104]For a discussion of this in terms of the production and marketing of AIDS "kitsch," see Daniel Harris, "Making Kitsch From AIDS," *Harpers* (July 1994): 55-60.

[105]Montreal *Gazette* (24 January, 1994).

[106]He was also named by ABC's 20/20 as one of the "Ten Most Fascinating People of 1994;" was honoured with the following "awards" in *US: The Entertainment Weekly*'s "Seventh Annual Readers' Poll" (November 1994): "Best Actor, Movies," "Best Movie Couple" (with Meg Ryan in *Sleepless in Seattle*,) "Celebrity you'd vote into office," and was the lead in the top two movies under the category "Which recent movie made you cry the most?"[for *Philadelphia* and *Forrest Gump*]. "Maybe he should change his last name to Hankie," *US* suggests.

Though we are tired of offensive and clichéd images of our lives; though we refuse to have our lives reduced to empty one-liners or the butt of jokes; I take as axiomatic a departure from the posturing of so-called "positive image" criticism that doesn't really get us far beyond the initial image or representation.[107] A more vital strategy of critique necessarily shifts the focus to ask: who manipulates and controls these representations of the body of AIDS, and whose pleasure and/or power do these representations serve?[108]

Philadelphia does much to emphasize the persistence of the representation of the queer male body as the site for the stable signification of AIDS: as the body of the condemned--as it inevitably must, since this is a film about a gay man with AIDS (or is it?)--and/or as incidental to a larger "liberal" agenda that effaces homosexuality to (re)distribute and (re)inscribe more traditional values. Despite the film's posturing as a heroic treatment of homosexuality and AIDS, Demme has offered us instead a postmodern cinematic Norman Rockwell painting for the age of epidemic.

To elaborate this, I will start with Kaja Silverman's work on the "dominant fiction:"

> In an interview with the editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, [Jacques Rancière] proposes that we think of a society's ideological "reality" as its "dominant fiction."[. . .] the dominant fiction represents primarily a category for theorizing hegemony, and once again it functions as a mirror. Rancière defines it as "the privileged mode of representation by which the image of the social consensus is offered to the members of a social formation and within which they are asked to identify themselves."[. . .] He maintains that America's

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[107] I am thinking here of the approach often taken in the gay press that assumes "positive images" of gay life and sexuality will provide the means by which to effect social change. For a discussion of this position, see *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol. 11, no.1, (1991), a special issue on "Gay People, Sex, and the Media," especially Larry Gross, "Out of the Mainstream: Sexual Minorities in the Mass Media," 19-46.
See also Silverman's discussion of Fassbinder and Lacan ("A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look, and Image"), which rejects "positive image criticism" in favour of what Fassbinder himself calls an "aesthetics of pessimism," his "radical refusal to *affirm*." Silverman quite eloquently states that: "The risk implicit in any politics devoted to what might be described as a 'representational contestation' is that it will give fresh life to the notion that what is needed are 'positive' images of women, blacks, gays, and other disenfranchised groups, images which all too often work to resubstantialize identity, and even at times to essentialize it" (*Male Subjectivity* 154).
See also Thomas Waugh, "The Third Body: Patterns in the Construction of the Subject in Gay Male Narrative Film."
For a counter discussion of my reading of *Philadelphia* see Richard Lippe, "For *Philadelphia*," *cineACTION*, no. 35 (August 1994): 25-28, which supports the film as "a valuable and important piece of aesthetically sophisticated and socially conscious filmmaking" (25).

[108] This question is a paraphrase from Garber, *Vested Interests*

> dominant fiction is "the birth of a nation," and that this story of national origin can be staged in several different ways, all of which hinge upon binary opposition--upon the adversarial relation of whites to Indians, North to South, and law to outlaw.[109]

The incidental construction of the queer male body in *Philadelphia* operates in conjunction with the dominant fictions of America culture, a strategy that, as Silverman notes, offers an identifactory relationship for the audience in ways that works to elicit consensus.[110] In *Philadelphia*, these dominant fictions circulate around: (1) an unrelenting faith in the integrity and efficacy of the American Judicial System--and by extension the American dream of "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness"; and (2) the recuperation of a normative model of American masculinity--and by extension heterosexual coupling, monogamy, child-rearing; in short, the nuclear family. AIDS and homosexuality in *Philadelphia* are the backdrops upon which these dominant fictions of familialism and nationalism are recontextualized, rewritten and reinscribed on the American psyche, and are negotiated, as I will discuss, through the intersection of the representation of the "Other" (specifically race and class).

Moreover, recent cultural work has done much to elucidate the complex and intricate ways in which these dominant fictions of American culture function simultaneously within a masculine economy, emphasizing the degree to which national identity and masculine identity are concomitant entities in popular cultural practices. Susan Jeffords's work, for example, offers an extensive analysis of a wide variety of Hollywood films to underscore how the identity of a nation (America) and its people is negotiated at the site of, and through, the representation of the body of the normative masculine subject. Jeffords writes that:

> during the Reagan era popular culture became the mechanism not simply for identifying but for establishing the relationship between

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[109]Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* 30. For the full Jacques Rancière text, see "Interview: The Image of Brotherhood," trans. Kari Hanet, *Edinburgh Magazine*, no. 2 (1977).

[110]Paraphrasing Rancière, Silverman has argued that "the dominant fiction consists of the images and stories through which a society figures consensus; images and stories which cinema, fiction, popular culture, and other forms of mass representation presumably draw upon and help to shape" (30).

> the people and the State, through the articulation of that State as the unified national body of masculine character. Consequently, the reformulation of the relationship between the people and the nation, as configured in the popular discourses of militarism, individualism, family values, and religious beliefs, was accomplished largely through the rearticulation of both the indidvidual and the nation in terms of masculine identities in such a way that actions by either side--individual or nation--were to be seen as impinging on and in many ways determining the other.[111]

Masculine identity, then, is the vehicle by which popular cultural narratives like *Philadelphia* can command faith in the dominant fictions defining American life. *Philadelphia* further problematizes Jeffords's thesis, for not only is national identity negotiated along distinctly (male) gendered lines--exemplified here in the individual struggle between Miller and Beckett and their united struggle against the American Judicial System--it is also negotiated as a function of heterosexual power. For it is Miller, not Beckett, who is constructed in the film as the new hero in this age of crisis, a crisis circulating around these very notions of familialism and nationalism.

Given Jeffords's thesis in general, and Silverman's thesis in particular, it is not insignificant, then, that the first Hollywood film on AIDS should bear the title that it does, for the city of Philadelphia is itself a metaphor for the American Dream, the site for the inception of the concept of America as the land of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." It is in Philadelphia, of course, that the Declaration of Independence was signed; it is also where the "founding fathers" drafted the US Constitution. The mythologies evoked by city of Philadelphia shape and support these dominant fictions of familialism and nationalism, situating the film's narrative within an historic framework that underscores the American values of "freedom" and "brotherly love" (reiterated, for example, in Neil Young's song "Philadelphia:" "City of brotherly love, place I call home;" in the images of the Liberty Bell from the opening montage of the film; and in Miller's response to the press during a protest/demonstration outside the court house, where, in

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[111] Jeffords, *Hard Bodies* 13.

defending Beckett's rights as an American, he makes specific reference to these historical narratives).

In addition to, but not exclusive of, the recuperation of the American nuclear family and the American Dream, the queer male body functions in *Philadelphia* as a sign for a culture defined by panic logic in the age of AIDS, displacing fear and anxiety among those portions of the population least likely to be infected with a sexually transmittable virus. This logic structures the entire narrative of *Philadelphia*, for as a conservative treatment of homosexuality--conservative in the sense that homosexuality is represented through the discourses of AIDS, promiscuity, and sites of erotic danger such as porno-theatres, rather than through a representation of intimacy, domesticity, and vulnerability between Beckett and his lover Miguel (Antonio Banderas)--masquerading itself as a "liberal" film, it is the traditional nuclear family that is the vehicle for the maintenance of clean bodily fluids and the depletion of the spread of viral infection, the reconfiguration of *dis*-ease that offers a form of "discursive privacy" to the procreative couple. This is achieved in part through the use of cuts or scenic transitions from the anxiety-producing body of AIDS to images and representations of the nuclear family.

For example, in an early scene in the film, Beckett is rushed to the hospital after having suffered an AIDS-related symptom. While there, he is informed by his law firm over the phone that an important document in his "Highline" case has gone missing from the office, a situation that ostensibly brings about his later dismissal from the firm (and sets in motion the court case that will ensue). As Beckett is on the phone with a law colleague trying to ascertain the whereabouts of this document, he thinks aloud to himself, saying: "Every problem has a solution." Of course, in the context of this scene, we know he is talking specifically about the lost document. While Beckett is on the phone, however, the camera is focused on the back of his neck, which is marked by a Kaposi's Sarcoma (KS) lesion, a visible signifier of the body of AIDS. Showing visible signs of anxiety, a black woman in the waiting room of the hospital notices this lesion (even though it looks more

like a bruise and would hardly be noticeable from the distance that separates them), perhaps mimicking the reaction Demme might expect from his "shopping mall" audience, the majority of whom have probably never seen a KS lesion but are certain this is one.

With the camera on the lesion, and Beckett asserting that "every problem has a solution," the scene immediately cuts to another hospital room, this time where Miller--the homophobic lawyer who will subsequently take Beckett's case--is witnessing the birth of his child. *Every problem has a solution.* Difference (the homosexual body of AIDS as "Other") is represented only to be displaced, a strategy of *dis*-ease that attempts to ward off cultural anxiety and to establish the nuclear family as a "prophylactic social device" (Singer), a strategy that will serve as a structuring principle for the entire narrative of *Philadelphia.*

Other examples from the film include Beckett's first visit to Miller's law office, when he asks Miller if he will take his case. Miller looks at Beckett's face and sees his lesions, asking him: "What happened to your face?" To which Beckett responds: "I have AIDS." With Miller's gaze focused on Beckett's lesions, the camera again quickly changes the frame of reference to focus on a photograph of Miller's new-born baby, the product of everything Beckett's sexuality would seem to reject.[112]

Similarly, when Beckett and his lover Miguel visit Beckett's family to discuss the impending court case, and how difficult it might be for the family (heterosexual anxiety) when they hear certain details about Beckett's life ("I'm worried about mommy and daddy," Beckett's sister complains), the occasion for this meeting is ultimately under the pretext of another occasion: the 40th wedding anniversary of Beckett's parents. Beckett's mother (Joanne Woodward), encouraging her son to proceed with the legal case against the law firm where he worked, suggests that she never raised her children to "sit in the back of

[112]These moments might be indicative of the thoughts we might expect Miller to have when confronted with the anxiety-producing signifiers of AIDS, offering for him (and by extension, the audience, for whom Miller elicits an identifactory relationship) a frame of reference by which to understand something that seems so unfamiliar. But the recurrence of these strategies in the film cannot escape critical scrutiny. I suggest that there is more going on here than an identification with what is in Miller's head at these moments.

the bus," thus invoking instances of racial discrimination to divert the real issue of AIDS, encouraging her son to stand up for what he represents but never really acknowledging that she accepts or understands or even cares to know what this might be. Beckett's family is unrealistically and unanimously supportive.

Also, in the media coverage of Hanks's acceptance speech for his Golden Globe, we are told that "Hanks delivered one of the more elegant speeches of the evening in accepting the Best Actor Award, paying tribute to AIDS victims [sic] and then citing the role that his wife, actress Rita Wilson, plays in his life. 'I'm a lucky man,' he said."[113] These anxiety producing moments circulating around the presentation of the body of AIDS are reconfigured into more traditional subjectivities and identifications.[114]

As a resultant consequence of the over-investment of familialism in popular cultural practices in general, the first Hollywood film on AIDS necessarily falls into the more familiar formula of the made-for-TV-AIDS-movie. Like *An Early Frost* and *Consenting Adults*, *Philadelphia* negotiates heterosexual anxiety so that AIDS and homosexuality are figured as objects of knowledge rather than as subjects of a discourse, the narrative often revolving around the (sometimes) double revelation to the family that their son is both gay and dying of AIDS. This narrative facilitates the eclipsing or displacing of difference by the over-investment of value in the familial economy, which is figured as threatened by these revelations.[115]

Despite the current trend to "universalize" AIDS, Paul Morrison has recently argued:

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[113] *Gazette* (24 Jan. 1994).

[114] Similarly, Tri-Mark's marketing strategy operates under the logic of displacement: one poster reads: "No one would take his case . . . until one man was willing to take on the system." And I thought this film was about AIDS. "Skittishness is also evident in Tri-Mark's marketing strategy for *Philadelphia*, which is being played pretty *straight*. The ads will plug Hanks and Washington and hit on the universal [American?] theme of the fight for justice. We're going to have a jillion dollar advertising budget, and most of it will go to advertising the film as a courtroom drama' " (*Esquire* 146; italics added)--a rather offensive statement in the present context, against, perhaps, the "beneficent effects of power" of HIV prevention and education campaigns, against, perhaps, social services for PWAs that a "jillion dollars" might better serve.

[115] A similar displacement occurs in the Maria Callas opera scene, which will be discussed in a later context.

> A medical condition in which the immune system effectively turns against itself may suggest, in the best postmodern fashion, a destabilization of identity, an effacement of the distinction between self and other, but the cultural logic that structures the epidemic tends toward the opposite. Important exceptions can be cited, but we are lass various than we care to acknowledge, and homosexuality elicits from our culture a response in which even the most diverse of its elements and ideologies find common cause. It is, then, without apology that I advance an argument quite this unnuanced: AIDS has served either to confirm the truth of gay identity as death or death wish, the better to return to those whose capacity for love is itself proof against illness an image of their own innate health, or to refigure the gay male subject as a heterosexual *manqué*, the better to vitiate the scandal that is gay sexuality.[116]

In the age of epidemic, the sanctity and security offered by the nuclear family is, perhaps, a "return to those whose capacity for love is itself proof against illness an image of their own innate health." By channeling Miller's anxieties into more traditional narratives and subjectivities, the film skirts away from the polemic of the relationship between "Self" and "Other," with the "Self" figured as the clean, non-contaminated, and non-contaminating heterosexual body of monogamy (Miller), and the "Other" figured as the unclean, contaminated and contaminating homosexual body of AIDS (Beckett). Rather than allowing Miller to confront head-on the instability of Self in relation to the Other, the rigidly dichotomous presentation of sexual identities within their pre-existing parameters secures rather than destabilizes the perceived erotic sites of danger and infection. Consistent with the historical discourses of the AIDS crisis, the presentation of Miller confirms what Treichler noted many years ago, namely, that "The text constructed around the gay male body [. . .] is driven in part by the need for constant flight from sites of potential identity and thus the successive construction of new oppositions that will barricade self from not-self."[117]

Foucault identifies the procedure of "confession" as a technique of power in the *scientia sexualis* for the production of the "truth of sex."[118] In a court room drama rife

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[116]Morrison 55.

[117]Treichler, "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification," 65.

[118]"The most discrete event in one's sexual behaviour--whether an accident or deviation, a deficit or an excess--was deemed capable of entailing the most varied consequences throughout one's existence [. . .] the

with cries of "objection" from both the prosecution and the defense, with arguments that witnesses' personal lives are irrelevant to the present case, Beckett gives an uninterrupted "confession" of the scandal that is gay sexuality, inciting AIDS discourse to articulate the "truth of sex" by implicating himself in the persecution and regulation of his own desires. It is a narrative of difference consistent with the treatment of AIDS in the mainstream press in the early years of the disease, establishing blame for AIDS as a consequence of one's erotic treasons and moral depravity. Two decades into the epidemic, Demme has willfully resurrected the innocent/guilty binary of AIDS "victims." The characterization of Andrew Beckett--in stark contrast to the former secretary of the law firm where Beckett worked who contracted HIV (not "AIDS," as the film suggests) as a result of a blood transfusion (the "innocent" AIDS "victim")--suggests the homosexual body as a body willfully seeking out avenues of infection.

The trope of innocence versus guilt here is a reiteration, with a homophobic twist, of a theme from the opening scene of the film, where Beckett (with the then unknown Miller), as lawyer, makes an impassioned appeal to obtain a restraining order against a construction site because of its effects on the children of the city (who are, incidentally, along with hemophiliacs, the other "innocent victims" of AIDS). Underscoring Beckett's compassionate understanding of the innocence of children, his own "responsibility" as a consenting adult is highlighted, blaming him not only for his own fate but also the moral welfare of society. This sense of individual responsibility is further highlighted when it is suggested that Beckett, as a consequence of his deviation from the norm of monogamy, might have infected his lover Miguel. Where, I am inclined to ask, is Beckett's lawyer in all this mess? Despite Miller's new-found and unexplainable legal savvy, he is disturbingly silent on these implausible and reprehensible lines of argument. Though the courtroom

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principle of sex as a 'cause of any and everything' was the theoretical underside of a confession that had to be thorough, meticulous, and constant, and at the same time operate within a scientific type of practice. The limitless dangers sex carried with it justified the exhaustive character of the inquisition to which it was subjected" (*The History of Sexuality* 65-66). One can't help but wonder if the defense lawyer in *Philadelphia* has been reading up on Foucault.

narrative informs us (beyond a shadow of a doubt) that these events were taking place around 1984-85 (Beckett admits he heard "something" about a "gay cancer" or "gay plague"), the faulty temporal and logistical schemata blames Beckett unequivocally for not fully acting on information that would have been impossible for him to possess at this time. What is on trial here then is not only his moral depravity and his lack of prescription to monogamy, but also his lack of responsibility *vis à vis* epistemology.[119]

In this narrative of depravity, it is suggested naively and unproblematically that "The Stallion Showcase Cinema"--where, we are told, Beckett had sex *only* once (!)--is unquestionably and inevitably the site of Beckett's HIV-infection, even though, given Beckett's age, we might assume he was sexually active prior to this period (1984-1985) and prior to the "discovery" of HIV in 1983. Though Beckett himself says he was infected when no one really knew too much about the virus, the cultural logic of *dis*-ease insists that HIV-infection is a result of a corrupt corporeality, not unprotected sex *per se*, but of the homosexual body that visits porno theatres, for such venues are preconceived as seething cauldrons of disease in the popular imaginary. Despite the "call to safety" in gay male health projects, Beckett is constructed here in such a way that renders homosexuality itself as a site of danger, as intrinsically unsafe. Though this is obviously a character assassination against Beckett conjured up by the defense in order to win the case, it is a presentation of the homosexual body of AIDS that is never challenged or deconstructed in the film, and perhaps suggests "a return to the trapping spatial determinisms of the 1950s and 1960s when gay identity was morally fixed and fatally demoralized by the underground spaces [. . .] designed to contain it."[120]

Despite the skewed logic of this film and the impossibility of its arguments, the scene is successful in establishing difference where difference might not be so readily

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[119]As Watney has noted of this historic period of the AIDS crisis, the notion of "ignorance" (as in the slogan "AIDS: Don't Die of Ignorance") "projects a mischievous implication of responsibility onto people who already have Aids, as if they'd set out to contract the HIV virus by ignoring information which [. . .] has never been widely available" (*Policing Desire* 136).

[120]Miller, "Outscape" 78.

manifested; that is, when it is difficult to tell where difference begins and where it ends--in this case, a closeted queer who "passes" for "straight"--popular cultural representations of the queer male body induce a state of visibilty that will barricade the queer male body with AIDS from the body of the normative (heterosexual) subject. When Beckett is questioned about his sexual adventures, the tone from the defense lawyer (Mary Steenburgen) becomes ridiculously serious, and the contorted and unsettling camera angles suggest we are in for something big, something, perhaps, almost surreal. More than just stereotypical representations, these moments in the film suggest that, as Garber argues in her thesis on cross-dressing and cultural anxiety, "It is as though the hegemonic cultural imaginary is saying to itself: if there is a difference (between gay and straight), we want to be able to see it; and if we see a difference [. . .] , we want to be able to interpret it." [121]

A similar cinematic technique is deployed in the now famous opera scene, where, following a costume party that Beckett and his lover throw, Beckett and his lawyer Miller are left alone in the studio to go over some legal matters. Beckett becomes enraptured by the music wailing in the background. As the aria "La Mamma Morta" from *Andrea Chénier* by opera diva Maria Callas fills his ears, despondency overpowers him, and as he is watched under the fearful gaze of Miller, he swirls animatedly about the room, filmed at odd and unsettling camera angles (much like in the court room scene), bathed in blood-red lighting, IV-stand serving as his dancing partner (he shows more affection for his IV-stand than he did for his partner Miguel in the previous scene). He translates the words for the obviously disconcerted Miller, who, strangely protected from the luminous glow of the red lights and the tilted frame, remains seated at the table watching this epiphany of Beckett's suffering. "It was during that sorrow that love came to me! I bring sorrow to those that love me! Live still! I am life! I am love! I am oblivion."

Underscoring the unrepresentability of homosexuality via the standards of heterosexual representation (intimacy, domesticity), Demme relies on constructing

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[121] Garber 130.

Beckett's (homo)sexuality through a strategy of displacement, here representing difference by way of a surreal stylistic cinematic effect, with Beckett represented as opera queen in unexplainable lighting and jarring camera work. Miller, in contrast, remains throughout this scene within the conventions of the cinematic realism to which the film aspires. We come to "know" Beckett's homosexuality only through these displacing signifiers of difference, thereby establishing again the distinction between Self (Miller) and Other (Beckett) and effectively reconfiguring *dis*-ease to ward off cultural anxiety.

Rather than assuming that this is *just* a commodification of gay male culture (Beckett as opera queen--how cliché!) in order to emit signs to turn the queer male body into an object of knowledge consistent with popular perceptions, I am more interested in asking: whose pleasure and/or power do these representation serve?

> There was one particular scene [. . .] that did prompt studio concerns right up until the end. It is a bit in which Hanks is attempting to translate, for the benefit of Denzel Washington, a favorite aria sung by Maria Callas. *It is the one moment in the film when Hanks's character*, carried away by his love for the music, puts away his power suit and his professional dignity and *allows himself to be openly gay.* [122]

Edelman has argued that:

> Interpretive access to the code that renders homosexuality legible may thus carry with it the stigma of too intimate a relation to the code and the machinery of its production, potentially situating the too savvy reader of homosexual signs in the context, as Sedgwick puts it, "of fearful, projective mirroring recognition." Though it can become, therefore, as dangerous to read as to fail to read homosexuality, homosexuality retains in either case its determining relationship to textuality and the legibility of signs.[123]

In the passage quoted above in reference to the opera scene, difference here is immediately registered "gay" (what Edelman calls "the graphic articulation of homosexuality"[124]), even though this particular scene has nothing to do with Beckett's sexuality *per se*. If this scene represents the only moment in the film where Beckett is "openly gay," then to be openly

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[122] Jennet Conant, "Tom Hanks Wipes That Grin Off His Face," *Esquire* (December 1993) 78; italics added.

[123] Edelman 7.

[124] Edelman 7.

gay means to be a body in excruciating pain, a subjectivity that can only be realized at the most intense moments of suffering and loss ("It was during that sorrow that love came to me! I bring sorrow to those that love me!"). Demme's strategy of representing difference through displacement is successful, for empathy and compassion (dare I say, identification?) for homosexuality can only be engaged in the context of AIDS, when the queer male body is always already on the verge of death, a celebration of Eros at the edge of Thanatos. That Beckett "puts away [. . .] his professional dignity" only serves to underscore again the stigmatization associated with homosexuality and the "shame" of dying of AIDS, which are really one and the same.

That "fearful recognition," the stigma attached to too intimate an access to the codes of homosexuality necessitates that this anxiety producing moment around the body of AIDS (as a body in pain) be recuperated and averted, both for Miller, and by extension, for the audience. Immediately following this scene, Miller, distraught almost to the point of fear by Beckett's pain, flees the studio, momentarily pausing outside in the hallway and contemplating returning to Beckett. It is the one and only moment in the film when the homophobic Miller could have redeemed himself by facing *his* fears rather than running away. Of course, he chooses the latter, and as the same Callas aria starts again, Miller is transported to the sanctity and security of his nuclear family, stopping in his child's room to hold his baby before falling into bed and the arms of his sleeping wife. As he gazes at her lovingly but with evident fear in his eyes, the music reaches a crescendo, and we can only assume that Beckett is left completely alone in his studio in utter despair. *Every problem has a solution.* Though it is one of the few moments in the film where we are given visible signs of *Beckett's* suffering, the logic of *dis*-ease dictates that Miller's fears and anxieties will take precedence and importance over Beckett's, whose excessive affect instigated this primal scene in the first place. (No wonder Miller looks so disconcerted. Who would behave this way? Alas, it is a performance that could only be conjured up by

an emotionally distraught homosexual. Though it has the potential to be sublime, in the context of the film it quickly disintegrates into the ridiculous.)

At the same costume party in Beckett's studio immediately prior to the Callas/opera scene, we are taken on a quintessentially queer journey through the underground world of gay male culture, filled with the requisite drag queens and mincing boy-toys and their salacious sallies and quixotic quips, a party that is graced with the presence of the divine Quentin Crisp, the (late) outspoken AIDS activist Michael Callen, and the provocative writer/artist Karen Finley. It is, perhaps, a stretch of the imagination to believe that Miller, who earlier professed his disgust of homosexuals, would agree to attend, and be so comfortable, at this his "first official gay party." More importantly, it is equally a stretch of the imagination to believe that Beckett, a closeted corporate lawyer, would be friends with the likes of these people. What, then, we might ask, are these signs, these graphic articulations, *doing* in the film?

Foucault writes that:

> [t]he body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use.[125]

In *Philadelphia*, the queer male body is forced to carry out tasks (the promiscuous homosexual in the porn theatre), to perform ceremonies (the gay man as opera queen), and to emit signs (KS lesions). Though the discourses surrounding the film point to moments like these as examples of the film's benevolent fight for justice regardless of sexual orientation (the political investment of the body: Demme, we are told, "even managed to keep a few characters in drag, despite the forces of political correctness"), these representations negotiate the deployment of difference as the clarification and reinforcement that these people are somehow different from the members of the "shopping mall" audience

[125]Foucault, *Discipline* 25-26.

(the economic investment of the body) and that this will not happen to them, a strategy of *dis*-ease that keeps sexuality and AIDS in their proper place. In short, it is a strategy, as Garber writes, "fueled by a desire to *tell the difference*, to guard against a difference that might otherwise put the identity of one's own position in question." [126]

Both Demme and (screenwriter) Ron Nyswaner insist that Hollywood's reluctance to treat AIDS is less a result of industry homophobia than that AIDS is "inimical to most anything that could justifiably be called entertainment." Nyswaner argues that "Hollywood is appropriately reluctant to make movies about subjects that are unpleasant."[127] Forget for a moment the fact that Demme's previous success *The Silence of the Lambs*--about a transvestite serial killer who makes body-suits from the skin of the women he kills, an "unpleasant" subject if ever there was one--had little trouble being produced and marketed; forget for a moment too the fact that *Philadelphia* has been hugely successful, despite the apparent unpleasantness of *its* subject matter. More importantly here, if Hollywood is reluctant to treat AIDS because of its unpleasantness, then it seems that the unpleasantness of homosexuality is similar to the unpleasantness of AIDS, perhaps even *more* unpleasant, given its glaring absence from the film. As Demme has constructed it, homosexuals dislike homosexuality as much as heterosexuals.

Homosexuality is represented and subsequently contained *vis-à-vis* an AIDS narrative, facilitated through the existing (and convenient) cultural slippage of homosexuality as always already indissolubly identifiable with AIDS, a strategy of displacement that facilitates the projection of homoeroticism into the realm of homophobia, where queer male desire is inscribed onto the body of the normative heterosexual subject, who serves as the pivot and frame of reference for these "Other" sexualities (Grosz). With the exception of their brief dance at the studio party, Beckett and Miguel are only ever shown together as a united force in the fight against Beckett's illness, from the first scene

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[126] Garber 130.
[127] *Esquire* 78.

in the hospital and the confrontation with the doctor to the final scene with Miguel at Beckett's death-bed. Rather than just a safe strategy of (non)representation in a conservative film marketed for mass distribution, the absence of eroticism between Beckett and Miguel serves to suggest that the only connection gay men have with each other is in relation to AIDS, treating homosexuality not at the level of homosexual subjects, but at the level of its deviation from the norm of the healthy heterosexuality.

This is most clearly illustrated in the drugstore scene, when a young, black, athletic man sexually propositions Miller (who is buying diapers for his baby!), forcing Miller to confront the instability of his own masculine identity and his homophobia. When the young man asks Miller to go for a beer, assuming Miller to be gay because of his involvement with this case, the distinction between Self and Other is momentarily effaced, a distinction that is quickly renegotiated to secure Miller's identity. It is significant to say the least that the scene of seduction involves a young gay man who is both black and athletic; that is, an embodiment of a "normative" masculinity, with its racial inflections, in Miller's own image, despite this young man's queer affliction. Insisting that he is not a homosexual, Miller queries: "Do I look gay?" To which his new friend, butch and healthy, responds, "Do I look gay? " Miller retaliates with the usual violence, grabbing the man by the jacket, smashing the items off the shelf and storming out of the store, ironically blaming this young man's proposition for turning men like Miller into homophobes.

Heterosexual anxiety is again highlighted, now at the site where homophobia intersects with desire. The only explicit manifestation of homoerotic desire in the film is treated with disgust, contempt, and violence, for Miller, no doubt the hero of the film, can defend--though not tolerate--homosexuality only under the pretext that the law has been broken. Though on the cultural and social level he finds it personally disgusting (he admits to his buddies in a bar while watching TV coverage of the case that it makes him sick to think about what gay men do to each other), as an embodiment of American masculinity commanding faith in the efficacy of the dominant fictions of American culture, his own

personal views take a backseat over the concerns of the nation. And though we are never given any clear indication why Miller ultimately decides to take Beckett's case, his fight for justice in the halls of the American Judicial System momentarily blinds us to, and actually valorizes, his violent homophobia, suggesting that even in the most adverse and painful situations, the American Dream can indeed come true. The recuperation of the American Dream at the site of the normative masculine subject sustains rather than threatens traditional subjectivities and sexual formations of pleasure and power.

Earlier in the Callas/opera scene, Miller's concerns, fears and anxieties are similarly foregrounded, when Miller confesses to Beckett about the social and cultural conditioning that creates and fosters the homophobia exemplified in Miller. Though these (liberal?) moments are presumably an attempt to address the concerns of a wider, more mainstream (heterosexual) audience, the foregrounding of Miller's anxiety (and the implication that we should be sympathetic to his plight) denies the reality that some gay people might already share this knowledge of societal attitudes and its social repercussions (like Beckett, for example, who remains closeted at the office because of his colleagues' professed homophobia). Furthermore, this unacknowledged discrepancy between what heterosexuals "think" and what homosexuals "know" does little (or nothing) to problematize the difficulty of "coming out" for those confronted by the attitudes Miller embodies.

Despite *Philadelphia*'s preachy sermon on homosexuality (Miller cuts to the chase in the courtroom by arguing that this case is not about AIDS but "the general public's hatred, loathing, and fear of homosexuals"); despite the discourses circulating around the film that insist on its benevolent and daring treatment of AIDS; it is the structures of class and race that are transgressed. From the opening montage of the film, race and class are invoked as dominant concerns of contemporary urban life in America. That Miller is a black, somewhat disreputable personal-injury lawyer from a lower middle-class world defending a white, upper middle-class successful lawyer, suggests that, as others have argued (in different contexts), the male body is the site for the inscription of narratives of

difference, narratives that mobilize race and class as strategic tools for negotiating and then displacing the issues of homosexuality (and AIDS). Though race and class are never specifically addressed in *Philadelphia*, their function in the film is consistent with Cynthia Fuchs's thesis on the "buddy politic" in the Hollywood "action" genre, a genre, she argues, that works to "efface the intimacy and vulnerability associated with homosexuality by the 'marriage' of racial others, so that this transgressiveness displaces homosexual anxiety." Fuchs goes on to state that, "Built on the bankability of two male stars, the buddy film negotiates crises of masculine identity centered on questions of class, race, and sexual orientation, by affirming dominant cultural and institutional apparati."[128]

Miller's assertion about "the general public's hatred, loathing, and fear of homosexuals" facilitates Miller's role as "hero" in the film, since he is articulating attitudes and characteristics constitutive of his own identity and is thus seen to be challenging a system in which he recognizes his own complicity. But when we move outside the film and examine its extra-textual discourses, it appears that art cannot imitate life, for the other star of this film, Hanks, can be treated as the "hero" only outside the narrative of the film itself: that is, he is accorded heroic status because he chose to play the role of a homosexual with AIDS even though he himself is straight and healthy.[129] As a homosexual with AIDS in the film, his fictional character cannot bear the burdens of an "heroic" status, and thus it is Miller, the literal embodiment in the film of what Hanks represents in "real" life (straight and healthy), who will take on this cinematic heroic role.

"Hanks is being saluted as the Neil Armstrong of cinematic sexual exploration: An all-American hero, in the name of progress, touches his lips to those of a fellow man. One small peck for Hanks, one giant step for mankind."[130] Perhaps I lapsed into

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[128]Fuchs 195.

[129]Like Miller in the film, Hanks's real life "status" as representative of American masculinity intersects with the dominant fictions of America culture: "It's not that he's especially enlightened when it comes to either the heterosexual or homosexual way of life. It's just that he's a big believer in 'the concept of tolerance in America' " (*Esquire* 80).

[130]*Esquire* 76.

unconsciousness during my screenings of the film, but I do not remember Hanks touching his lips to those of fellow man Banderas. More important is the question as to "progress" for whom? Given the success of the film in terms of box-office revenues and the substantial gains Hanks has made in his career, the answer is simple enough. But in terms of progress for the representation of homosexuality and AIDS in mainstream cinema, I am a little less certain. *Philadelphia* has not been successful in ushering in a whole slew of Hollywood movies about AIDS, which it was believed would occur if *Philadelphia* was financially successful.[131]

Immediately following the above quotation, in an attempt to downplay the perceived heroism Hanks is accorded for playing a homosexual with AIDS, the interviewer/author suggests that "Besides, he'd [Hanks] already spent two years on *Bosom Buddies*, playing a man in woman's clothing."[132]Besides what? Such a statement makes me wonder again about the nature of the "progress" referred to. The assumption is that Hanks has in some manner already dealt artistically with the issue of homosexuality, since he played a cross-dresser on a television sitcom, and thus his role in *Philadelphia* is just a natural extension of previous artistic explorations. Hanks and his roommate, played by former *Newhart* star Peter Scholari, dressed as women simply in order to live in an all-women boarding-house, and at every turn the producers went to great lengths to assert the rampant heterosexuality of both men. Though the show contained no "homosexual subplot," this (un)critical slippage from Hanks's role in *Philadelphia* to his role in *Bosom Buddies* is consistent with Sedgwick's thesis that " 'everyone already knows' that cross-dressing usually at least alludes to male homosexuality; 'everyone already knows' that the surplus charge of recognition, laughter, glamour, heightened sexiness around this topic comes from its unspecified proximity to an exciting and furiously stigmatized social field."[133]

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[131]The only Hollywood film following *Philadelphia* whose main subject is AIDS is *The Cure* (Peter Horton, 1995), about two young, fatherless boys, one of whom has AIDS.

[132]*Esquire* 82.

[133]Sedgwick, and Michael Moon, "Divinity: A Dossier, A Performance Piece, A Little-Understood Emotion" 19.

In contrast to these signifying practices of homosexuality, the extra-textual discourses on Hanks attempt the recuperation of American masculinity by asserting Hanks's real life function as the "heterosexual poster-boy," displacing anxiety by distancing Self from Other, as if the American public were incapable of the willing suspension of disbelief and viewing Hanks's role in *Philadelphia* as merely *one* role among many. The cover of *Esquire*, for example, has Hanks poised in white T-shirt, sleeves rolled à la James Dean (oh, the irony), right arm flexed, fist clenched, and a strident, confident, assertive look on his face. Displaying his lik'-'em-stik'-'em red-ribbon AIDS awareness tattoo in pseudo-defiance, the caption reads: "Tom Hanks Gets Tough." Donning the accouterments of the "heterosexual poster-boy," one can easily imagine Hanks's spinmasters generating their promotional savvy to present Hanks as secure in his masculine identity, despite--rather, because of--his role as a gay man with AIDS. "Though Hanks is not one for exposing his private life for public consumption . . . [he's] made it plain enough."[134]

In the January 94 issue of *Premier* magazine, with Hanks and Washington gracing the cover for their roles in *Philadelphia*, there is a rather telling interview with Will Smith, discussing his role as a gay man in *Six Degrees of Separation*. Smith informs us that he called Denzel Washington "to get his opinion on how people look at the roles you choose." Washington's response: "white people generally look at a movie as acting. They accept the actors for who they are, and the role is separate. But black people, because they have so few heroes in film, tend to hold the artists personally responsible for the roles that they choose. You can act all you want, but don't do any real physical scenes. Don't be kissing no man."[135]

Such a scenario serves to displace responsibility to a queer politics by pitting the concerns of the gay community against the black community in America, with the

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[134]*Esquire* 80.
[135]*Premiere* 76.

assumption that, since black men have so few "heroes" to represent them, they are exempt from portraying queer sexual practices. The resurrection of a monolithic and totalized black/white binary functions to deny the fact that it is not only black people who have so few "heroes" to represent them in film, delimiting, therefore, the recognition that there can exist shared subjectivities and identities within diverse racial groups. This compulsory heterosexuality at the site of the (racial) "Other" has displaced the fact too that there are members of the black community for whom some identification with gay characters would be a welcomed cinematic moment. Such a logic is consistent with Butler's argument that "sexual regulation operates through the regulation of racial boundaries, and . . . racial distinctions operate to defend against certain socially engineered sexual transgressions."[136]

As Demme and Nyswaner themselves articulate, the narrative structure of *Philadelphia* must necessarily focus attention away from the issues of homosexuality and AIDS, but their arguments for doing so do not confront the homophobia that is no doubt operating. When searching for a script, while not wanting "to make a movie about AIDS that side-stepped the gay community," what they were looking for was the "gripping movie one-liner." Nyswaner argues that "Disease movies tend not to work anyway. [. . .] People didn't go see *Dying Young* [1991]. But *Terms of Endearment* [1983] was a good model for us, because although Debra Winger dies, you don't say it's a movie about cancer. It's about a mother-daughter relationship. What we were looking for was that second thing."[137] The obvious response to this dilemma would be the question as to why, in a film that ostensibly treats homosexuality and AIDS, that "second thing" was *not* the relationship between the two gay men?

More significantly, however, to call the screenwriter on his own words, as *Terms of Endearment* is not "about" cancer, then might it be argued that neither is *Philadelphia* "about" AIDS? Though Demme and Nyswaner themselves support my thesis of the

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[136]Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 20.
[137]Green, *Premiere* 57.

incidental construction of the queer male body, there is a paradoxical tension at work when we consider the film's reception: why have the various popular discourses that shape and support the film singularly and authoritatively insisted that *Philadelphia* is a noble and groundbreaking effort in the fight against AIDS?

Is the film's artistic and commercial success attributable to the high-production quality and superb casting of the film, or has the deployment of difference hit an epidemic nerve in such a way that would assure *Philadelphia*'s success? As Grosz has argued, public health policy on AIDS offers a form of "discursive privacy" to the normative heterosexual couple, especially the husband/father, a scenario I attempted to support in my analysis of the discourse of "tainted-blood." As I have tried to demonstrate in my discussion of *Philadelphia*, it is not only public health policy that offers such narratives of AIDS, for popular cultural practices in the age of epidemic often work toward the same end.

Though *Philadelphia* is but one text in a proliferation of mediated representations, its capacity to transform the experiences of gay men with AIDS to reinscribe the dominant fictions of American culture is a disquieting moment in our current power-knowledge relations. When the dust of controversy settles on the celluloid, when *Philadelphia* is relegated from its status as *the* exemplary and benevolent popular cultural artifact for the fight against AIDS, and when newer and more topical treatments of the disease enter cultural currency, all we will be left with, to quote Hanks from his Academy Award acceptance speech, is the resounding refrain: "God Bless America!"

when we are loved we are afraid
love will vanish
when we are alone we are afraid
love will never return
and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
nor welcomed
but when we are silent
we are still afraid.

So it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.

--Audre Lorde

CHAPTER THREE:

FROM MORON TO MARTYR AND BACK AGAIN:

AIDS, THE REITERATIVE POWER OF DISCOURSE, AND THE POST-*PHILADELPHIA* CANONIZATION OF TOM HANKS IN *FORREST GUMP*

> The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law.
>
> --Michel Foucault[138]

> We got married because we love each other and we decided to make a life together. We are heterosexual and monogamous and take our commitment to each other very seriously. There is not and never has been a prenuptial agreement of any kind. Reports of a divorce are totally false. There are no plans, nor have there ever been any plans for divorce. We remained very married. We both look forward to having children.

On Friday, May 6th, 1994, the above full-page ad, paid for by Richard Gere and Cindy Crawford, appeared in the *London Times*, at an unfathomable cost of almost $40, 000 (US). Without pausing to elaborate on the meaning of "very married" (they have subsequently filed for divorce), the ad goes on to inform us that, in the interim to having children, the couple is devoting much of their time and energy to "difficult causes," such as: "AIDS research and treatment, Tibetan independence, cultural and tribal survival. international human rights, gay and lesbian rights, ecology, leukemia research and treatment, democracy movements, disarmament and non-violence."

Not ones to revel in the postmodern axioms of ambiguity and uncertainty, these protestations have surfaced in spite of--or, rather, because of--Gere's recent participation as a gay choreographer (is that phrase redundant?) who dies of AIDS in the HBO version of Randy Shilts's plague epic *And The Band Played On*, and Crawford's memorable and "controversial" (?) August 1993 *Vanity Fair* cover, in which she plays "femme" (clad in bustier and high heels) to k. d. lang's "butch," (stunningly adorned in business man's

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[138] *The History of Sexuality* 3.

blue), one of the most significant cultural representations responsible for catapulting the "lesbian chic" movement currently sweeping the popular media.

I raise this here to suggest that perhaps the least interesting point of tension is the repeated speculation of Gere and Crawford's homosexuality (which prompted the ad), but rather, to ask, why, in a milieu ostensibly marked by an increased "tolerance" for "difference" (a difference that is articulated by the very litany of "difficult causes" the ad itself cites), the popular imaginary necessitates and legitimizes such a hostile (and comical) affirmation of heterosexuality, monogamy, and familialism? What, for example, is at stake when these cultural narratives are juxtaposed to texts like *And the Band Played On*, or the political bravado of the *Vanity Fair* cover, texts which offer themselves as "liberal" responses to the "problems" or conditions of contemporary life? Is such a rigid insistence on an identifactory relationship with the familial structure of desire not part of a larger cultural condition in late twentieth century American culture? How, and to what ends, do these narratives of dominant cultural values intersect with the representation of the "Other," and does the deployment of "difference" in these cultural spaces operate as a strategy of displacement under the cultural logic of *dis*-ease?

What does all of this have to do with the discourses of AIDS in general and the cultural signification of Tom Hanks in particular--the two topics this chapter will address? I begin with this example to suggest a double polemic in which to situate ourselves in relation to the production and reception of popular cultural texts that seek to represent "difference" as a viable cultural commodity. In this chapter, I will in part return to the discursive formation of AIDS in *Philadelphia*, specifically *vis-à-vis* the extra- and para-textual publicity discourses surrounding Tom Hanks and his post-*Philadelphia* success (his cinematic canonization) in his most recent film, *Forrest Gump*. Under the tenets of the cultural logic of *dis*-ease in the current sexual economy, I will examine the ways in which the Hollywood Marketing Machine necessitates the differentiation of actors' "real" sexual preferences and way of life from the mediated constructions *vis-à-vis* the roles that they

choose, especially and most tenaciously if those roles are deemed "controversial" or transgressive. The intimate biographical details of actors' lives offered to the consuming public function as a strategy of displacement and disavowal, rendering "difference" a fictional construct, so that the popular narratives surrounding Hollywood stars like Hanks are informed by, and tend to promote, the prevailing climate of sexual conservatism generally sweeping American culture--what *Village Voice* writer Richard Goldstein has called "the new sobriety."[139] As I have argued in the previous chapters, this sexual climate of conservatism is intricately bound to the production and proliferation of the nuclear family as an identifactory site of power and pleasure, a site that insidiously opposes alternative sexual paradigms in the current sexual economy and works to alleviate anxiety around certain cultural representations. This chapter will conclude with an analysis of *Forrest Gump*, specifically in relation to the popular cultural construction of the American male as a singular and monolithic entity, and how this representation intersects with the deployment of multiple "Others" in such a way that dominant cultural values are reproduced in these instances.

As the title of this section suggests, I will again take as axiomatic the notions raised earlier in the previous chapters: that is, I will explicitly consider the ways in which the reiterative power of discourse functions to produce the phenomenon it seeks to contain and control, how the "paradoxical" nature of power excludes certain subjects from systems of discourse yet everywhere rearticulates them within that system as sites of danger, phantasmatic objects of over-investment. Though the subject matter of *Forrest Gump* seems as far removed from the narratives of AIDS and homosexuality as one could get, the reiterative power of discourse reinscribes this film and Hanks's role in it within the context of AIDS, so that that which is culturally "Other" serves as markers for reconfiguring the traditional values that *Forrest Gump* itself will propagate. This is affected by the deployment of multiple "Others" in the extra-textual discourses of the film, where AIDS

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[139] qtd. in Singer 62.

and homosexuality are called upon in such a way that dominant values of sexual exchange are maintained. In the film itself, AIDS and the "feminine" are deployed as "Other," shifting and threatening signifiers that pose a "risk" to the stable and coherent construction of the American male, offering again a form of "discursive privacy" to the latter that works in analogous ways to the discursive formation of AIDS. The extra-textual narratives of Hanks's "real" life perform a metonymic operation for the structures of identification and desire that *Forrest Gump* represents, and thus renders problematic the autonomy of the text, making it difficult to tell where one begins and where one ends.

In the June 94 issue of *Vanity Fair*, we are offered a follow-up to Hanks's renowned success in *Philadelphia*, having picked up an Oscar for Best Actor and going on to become the new American spokesman for the AIDS crisis. Given the fleeting attention span of the American consumer in general, and the ephemeral quality of Hollywood cinema in particular, Hanks has, in a very short time, been elevated from his status as the voice of AIDS and has come to signify the new American male who can serve as spokesman for the entire age, a prophet for the "new sobriety" generally sweeping the American nation. This post-Oscar signification is doubly articulated, I will argue, in the recent *Forrest Gump*, making Hanks the perfect role model for reinvigorating both fictional and "factual" concepts of American manliness, a fluid cultural signification that is suggested in the article by *Vanity Fair*.

Aptly titled "Tom Terrific," the article begins with the following headline:

> The 1994 Academy Awards will be remembered as the night Tom Hanks came out--the boy-next-door comedian had become a major star. The following day, the 37 year-old Best Actor, who stars in the upcoming *Forrest Gump*, spoke openly to KEVIN SESSUMS about the motives behind his controversial speech and how the love of a good woman has chased away the ghosts of his lonely childhood.

Though he has been relegated from his position as AIDS spokesmodel, these post-*Philadelphia* discourses have an insidious way of circling back to the "Other," so that the representation of "difference" works as a strategy of displacement and disavowal of these

very subjectivities. The article's harnessing and appropriation of gay liberation ease ("coming out"), and the reference to his "controversial speech" (AIDS as "Other"), functions to establish the masculine subject ("the boy-next-door") within a singular and monolithic frame, signified here by the ultimate and universal masculinist goal: "the love of a good woman." By implicitly reiterating AIDS and homosexuality, by reiterating, that is, difference, the "Other" serves as the backdrop for the affirmation of subscription to normative masculinity, heterosexuality, and the pleasures of the procreative couple.

The biographical information offered here and elsewhere directly mimics the character portrayed in *Forrest Gump*, so that these cultural values of masculinity and heterosexuality are doubly inscribed at the site of the "Other," a blurring of the boundaries between factual and fictional narratives of subjectivity. The passages about Hanks from *Vanity Fair* resonates with the various descriptions of the fictional *Forrest Gump*. *Entertainment Weekly* for example describes Gump as follows: "Short on intelligence but loaded with luck, the sweet-natured, slightly simple hero of this whimsical drama seeks his destiny as, by turn, an all-American football player, a Vietnam hero, and a successful business man, though *all he longs for is to be with his childhood sweetheart.*"[140]

Vanity Fair calls *Forrest Gump* "An allegorical film [. . .] a heart-wrenching story in which the title character is a simpleton who embodies nothing less than all that is good about post-World War II America." As the numerous articles remind us, Hanks is still fanning the flames of controversy over his Academy Award acceptance speech, the culminating moment of his cinematic and cultural canonization that left the audience with the confusing sentiment: "God Bless America." Without knowing it at the time, Hanks offered a platitude that could sum up in three short words the entire scope of his next film, *Forrest Gump*, which will continue where *Philadelphia* left off, the ultimate "allegory" for the articulation of the phantasmatic belief in the sanctity and benevolence of American life (it is an awfully long film, considering its an allegory of all that's good about post-war

[140] *Entertainment Weekly* May 27, 1994: 42; italics added.

America). We are witness here to the reiterative power of the discourse of *Philadelphia* to regulate, contain, and (re)distribute the moral message of AIDS for our culture, even in spaces like these that seem so remote from this stigmatized social field. Unwittingly, *Vanity Fair* attests to this, for repeated throughout the article on *Forrest Gump* are reminders of Hanks's benevolent AIDS crusade: "I thought the speech was incredible, and in a sense communicated more about what *Philadelphia* was saying--and reached more people--than the movie itself will."[141]

With *Forrest Gump* behind him, *Vanity Fair* begins its article with a reference to Hanks's next project, called *Apollo 13*, a fictional reenactment of a factual 1970 lunar mission that was aborted halfway to the moon when an oxygen tank exploded and NASA had to improvise Apollo 13's return to Earth. With Hanks in the lead as real-life astronaut James Lovell,[142] director Ron Howard argues that "I think Tom will give the character a greater sense of humanity, as opposed to astronaut as icon."[143] Though the subject matter is as far removed from the subject of AIDS as one could get, the film is structured within the paradigm Hanks offered as Andrew Beckett. Though it is not unusual for an actor's current role to be treated in light of pervious ones, the function of Hanks's role as a gay man who dies of AIDS is more central in these extratextual spaces than any pervious role, and is not, I would argue, simply a result of his new Oscar status. For the same mechanisms that made it possible for him to win Best Actor are also in place in these discourses. Why on earth (pun intended!) our culture needs representations of astronauts with "a greater sense of humanity" is a question both amusing and telling, for in addition to the rearticulation of one of the dominant fictions of American life--the colonization of space as the lost conquerable frontier--it also serves as an opportunity to underscore the benevolence and heroic status that is accorded to a straight actor who has the courage to play a queer. But one must pose this question: could this "greater sense of humanity" that

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[141]Steven Spielberg, qtd. in *Vanity Fair* 148.
[142]The film is based on his novel *Lost Moon*.
[143]*Vanity Fair* 100.

Hanks is perceived to be capable of only be realized and actualized as a "natural" extension of his role in *Philadelphia*; that is, not the role of Andrew Beckett *per se*, but the fact that Hanks *chose* to play that role?

> Even is his stoic stillness he so breathtakingly displayed in *Philadelphia*, we could sense the will power it took for him to sit up. [. . .] This time out, it is the sweet machinery of NASA's know-how [they are being consulted for the film] that will provide it [*Apollo 13*] with its special swagger; it is the sweet machinery of Hank's know-how that will provide it with its soul.[144]

Are we simply talking about Hanks's "superb" acting ability here, his "brilliant" portrayal of the injustices and sufferings associated with AIDS, or is this sense of humanity attributed to the fact that though Hanks is both straight and healthy, he had enough "humanity" to play the role of a gay man dying of AIDS (granted, a role few in Hollywood would have been willing to take)? I would argue that the current canonization of Hanks in the popular imaginary is attributable more to this dichotomy than to his acting ability, that this sense of humaneness is a direct manifestation of the courageousness with which Hanks is assumed to possess for too intimate a relation to the codes of homosexuality and AIDS, fields which he no doubt knows little about.[145] The extra-textual discourses structuring *Forrest Gump* exploit this dichotomy for economic prosperity, for Hanks's intimate connection with these two stigmatized social fields is seen as rather brave and bold (though never figured as profitable) for the new spokesmodel for American culture.

> I think it is every little boy's dream come true [. . .] every little boy wants to play a cowboy. He wants to play a baseball player. He wants to play an astronaut. Yet when this little boy grew up, he did not win his best-actor Academy Award for any of the roles in the litany he cites. Without apology and with fitting propriety, Hanks won it for portraying a homosexual who dies of acquired immune deficiency syndrome. Such a tragic outcome is most certainly not an all-American dream. It is nightmare--a global one.[146]

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[144]*Vanity Fair* 102.

[145]None of this is an attack on Hanks *per se*, but of the cultural and social mechanisms that have made Hanks so seductive and popular in the first place.

[146]*Vanity Fair* 102.

In the above passage, the blurring of fiction and reality, and the dismantling of the distinction between Self and Other, is evidenced, for what every little boy wants is not to *be* a cowboy, a baseball player, or an astronaut, but to "play" one," so that cinematic representation renders unnecessary the need to "willingly suspend one's disbelief" and view Hanks's roles as astronaut or cowboy or baseball player as not merely roles chosen but an intimate part of the Self: "what every little boy wants to be."

Such is not the case, however, when the role of "Other" is invoked--that which falls outside the realm of normative masculinity--a role that is all the more remarkable because it is figured as a fictional construct, not only that which every little boy doesn't want to be but that which someone like Hanks and the model he represents could never be. By invoking the fictional status of the role of the "Other," anxiety is successfully displaced, even though AIDS is figured as a "global nightmare" (the "universalization" of AIDS), effecting *real* bodies in the *real* world.

"Maybe he should be called St. Thomas," writes one critic, in response to the release of *Forrest Gump*. "[L]ast year, his Oscar-winning turn as an AIDS victim [sic] in *Philadelphia* and his smash success as a perfect widowed dad in *Sleepless in Seattle* made him a candidate for cinema canonization. With *Forrest Gump* [. . .] he cements his screen sainthood."[147] What social and cultural mechanisms are currently in place that would make it possible and seemingly plausible that a Hollywood icon, who, during the publicity for *Philadelphia* described himself as "the heterosexual poster-boy," or now, in the *Vanity Fair* interview calls himself America's "Hugh Beaumont" (referring to the father on *Leave it to Beaver*), or who has been labeled in the popular press as "a kind of Everyman, an all American Joe,"[148] a "regular Joe in movie star's clothing,"[149] should be accorded the status as spokesman for the new sobriety and the representation of the quintessential American male both in film and in real life only after--or because of--his participation as a

[147] *Gazette* (9 July 1994/E7).
[148] *Vanity Fair* 150.
[149] *US Magazine* 47.

gay lawyer in the first Hollywood film on AIDS? Which roles are scripted fiction, and which are real? Why these roles and the cultural significations they have elicited, and why now?

Though an in-depth inquiry could be made into the myriad of issues raised in *Forrest Gump*, I will restrict my comments as they relate to the cultural logic of epidemic. Again, as Singer reminds us:

> the disciplinary response to the epidemic of AIDS does not work primarily to alleviate or abolish the epidemic; on the contrary: it presumes epidemic and extends it through the social field, transforming "epidemic" not only into a readily transferable or "contagious" figure, but installing the presumed proliferative logic of epidemic as an abiding epistemic matrix for the disciplinary production of cultural knowledge about bodies in general.[150]

In keeping with the impetus of the previous chapters (*vis-à-vis* Singer), *Forrest Gump* exemplifies this cultural logic of epidemic, for AIDS, readily transferable, is mobilized in the film to discipline and control a whole set of social practices of the body that are culturally figured as "unhealthy," a "spawning" of new epidemics that is prompted by, but subsequently exceeds, the bounds of AIDS. Singer gives the example of the "Just Say No!" campaign--"not only to genital sex without prophylactic mediation, but also to an ever-proliferating range of objects including alcohol, nicotine and other drugs."[151] AIDS functions in *Forrest Gump* as the ultimate manifestation of the inevitable consequences of excess in the culture of epidemic, of refusing to "Just Say No!"--for other social malaise of drug abuse, sexual abuse, free and unregulated sexual exchange are similarly constructed, and like AIDS in other popular cultural spaces, are figured as a threat to the masculine economy and the pro-family values posturing of the film.

Forrest Gump attempts an epic overview of American history since the end of World War II, with allusions to almost every major political, cultural and historical event to effect and shape the popular consciousness of American life. Throughout the course of

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[150]Butler, in Singer 10.
[151]Singer 68.

three decades of Americana, the film offers us slices of "real" America, the experiences of individuals that need to be counted, deemed representative, rendered true. Gump, the film's protagonist, has the good fortune to meet some very famous people, and thus effect the course of events in American history: from unwittingly teaching Elvis Presley how to dance to breaking the Watergate scandal, Gump's innocent "charm" makes him a perfect figure not only to chart America's loss of innocence, but for offering resolutions for recuperating that innocence in an age of epidemic conditions. The character of Gump offers one example of prescribed masculinity whose adventure take him beyond the big screen and into the heart of American consciousness, its immense popularity (it became an instant hit last summer, a cultural touchstone reaching cult status) suggesting it has hit some nerve in the popular psyche.[152] But what is so pleasurable about *Forrest Gump*? Where does this pleasure come from? What are the implications of this pleasure? What gets legitimized in the film, and what gets proscribed under the banner of prescriptive masculinity?

In a film contaminated with virtually every icon of twentieth-century American culture, the representation of the Vietnam War, and the subsequent representation of Gump as a Vietnam vet, is, perhaps, the singular and most important signifying practice for establishing Gump as the embodiment of the new American male, and for securing his subjectivity within a singular and monolithic masculine economy. For this reason, then, I turn first to Susan Jeffords's text *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and The Vietnam War*, which offers surprisingly cogent arguments for consideration of the

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[152]Like *Philadelphia*, *Forrest Gump* has achieved both artistic success and unparalleled commercial success. To date, *Forrest Gump* has received three Golden Globe Awards (January 1995) for: (1) Best Dramatic Picture, (2) Best Director (Zemeckis), and (3) Best Actor (Hanks--his second year in a row).*Globe and Mail* Jan. 23, 95); Hanks has won the Screen Actors Guild Award (February 1995) for "Outstanding Performance in a Motion Picture" for his role in *Gump*; Harvard University's "Hasty Pudding Theatricals" has named Hanks 1995 Man of the Year (*Globe and Mail* 31 Jan. 95/A12); *Forrest Gump* was the big hit at the (March) 1995 Academy Awards, earning Best Director (Zemeckis), Best Actor (Hanks--again, his second year in a row), and Best Picture; the film was nominated for a total of 13 Academy Awards, the most for a single film since *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* in 1966 and one short of the all-time record of 14 for *All About Eve* in 1950 (*Globe and Mail* 15 Feb. 95/A9); Director Robert Zemeckis won the Director's Guild of America Award (March 1995); and in the most telling footnote of all, *Forrest Gump*, as of March 1995, has grossed a total of $312 million (US), making it the biggest box-office hit of all time (*Globe and Mail* 15 March 95/A10); similarly, it is estimated that this film alone has earned Hanks a personal wealth of approximately $35 million (US).

gender/sexual relations offered in *Forrest Gump*. In discussing the "masculine bond" and its gender implications in a host of popular Vietnam narratives in the eighties and nineties, Jeffords argues that:

> Whereas differences between men [. . .] can be overcome by the power of the masculine bond, differences between women and men are accentuated by it. In the world of the masculine bond, it is most important that these differences be marked in sexual terms. By perceiving women through a prism of sexuality, women's difference from men is meant to appear "natural" whereas the differences between men--class, race, and ethnicity--are made to seem circumstantial. The logic of the Vietnam narrative decrees that "natural" differences cannot be overcome, whereas social ones not only can but should.[153]

There are two central tensions in this passage that are specifically relevant to the gender, racial and class issues present in *Forrest Gump*: one, that men are different from women, and two, that men are not really all that different from each other. In addition to these polemics, the denial of difference as a structural device in the maintenance of the masculine bond is significant for my thesis on the cultural production of *dis*-ease, where the "feminine" (like AIDS) is constructed in the film as "Other," as a site of erotic danger that is figured as a "threat" to the masculine economy that must therefore be displaced or removed. The men whom Gump encounters in Vietnam and subsequently befriends are similarly figured as "Other," so that the film, in the logic of the masculine bond, can work toward the displacement of difference between men. In other words, where men are concerned, difference makes no difference. Gump, a mentally-deficient white-trash southern hick befriends both Bubba, a poor lower-class black man, who, though not given much more intellectual acumen than Gump, is clearly racially Other; and Lt. Dan, Gump's superior both in rank and intelligence.

That the film offers the possibility to assume that "all men are created equal" is galvanized in an ironic twist of logic when Lt. Dan, having lost his "limbs" in the war, asks Gump if he knows what it is like not to have the use of his "limbs." While not only typical

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[153]Jeffords 64.

of the film's comic structure (the insider joke)--the audience immediately realizes the irony of Lt. Dan's comments, for we know that as a child Gump did not have the use of his legs--this male bonding moment offers a most startling revelation for Gump, who immediately makes the assumption that these very dissimilar men are not so dissimilar after all. Gump's empathy with Lt. Dan's pain is a result of his own personal experience, securing the masculine bond in a scenario that seems highly unlikely and pointedly circumstantial.

One cannot help but read the phallic subtext operative in these references to Lt. Dan's missing "limbs," or Gump's inoperative or insufficient "limbs" in his childhood experiences--experiences, I believe, that come to signify in adulthood their impaired ability in heterosexual relations as a consequence of Gump's child-like level of intelligence, or Lt. Dan's mutilated corpus. Jeffords's has argued that one of the functions of popular Vietnam narratives is to establish veterans as "victims" not only of the American government, but also, and significantly, of the Women's Movement: "it becomes apparent that Vietnam representation is only topically 'about' the war in Vietnam or America's military strength or political policy-making. Its true subject is the masculine response to changes in gender relations in recent decades."[154] In light of such an analysis, the loss of "limbs" might be read as a manifestation or representation of the loss of phallic power in an increasingly changing landscape of power exchange, a power that the film will attempt to recuperate.

After the war is over, Gump and Lt. Dan have a chance meeting on New Year's Eve in New York City, where, after reminiscing about the good old days of war, they pick up two women in a bar and take them back to Lt. Dan's hotel room. As if to reenact their experiences of the war, both men suffer a severe case of "performance anxiety," this time not on the battle-front but on the home-front, which results in an outbreak of violence and the women being blamed for the ruined evening of sexual pleasure for bringing to the fore the reality of Lt. Dan's missing "limbs." Having spoken that which should remain silent, the women are dismissed from the scene of the masculine bond. With the men's mutual

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[154]Jeffords 167.

"castration" established earlier in the war sequence highlighted here in their inability to have sex with these women, war is feminized to mark a continuity of masculine victimization at the site of the "Other." By rejecting these women, the vets exonerate themselves from the atrocities of the Vietnam war itself, turning themselves into victims, their victimization constructed as a symbolic castration at the site of the feminine. "The masculine here represents itself as a 'separate world,' one that poses survival--finally the survival of masculinity itself--as dependency on the exclusion of women and the feminine."[155] Having excluded the feminine from their world, their friendship is now cemented, and these two men are now "free" to follow other pursuits, to continue the quest for masculine survival and prosperity.

In addition to the feminine as "Other," the film deploys racial "otherness" to similar ends. In the portrayal of the character of Bubba (Gump's friend from Vietnam who is killed in the War), the film would like us to assume that Gump's "colour-blindness" is a result of his child-like innocence, though I am more inclined to accept Jeffords's thesis and maintain that, on the surface, this displacement of difference is a structuring device for the securing of the autonomous masculine economy. Bubba's racial "Otherness" is rendered invisible in the eyes of Gump in the logic of the masculine bond, though racial otherness is deployed in more mischievous ways in other sequences of the film, specifically its attempts at political commentary about the various historic reenactments that drive the film's narrative.

In these political commentaries--which are mired in their jokey, superficial and caricatured manner--the film insists on the presentation of that which is racially Other, most strikingly and significantly in the sequences that are not directly related to the war narrative (that is, the sequences outside the masculine economy). The film offers racial commentary, for example, in its caricature of black militants in the Black Panther Party, with whom Gump's life-long "sweetheart" Jenny becomes involved. Given that Gump (and the film) is disdainful and critical of every thing Jenny comes to signify, and reading these

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[155]Jeffords 168.

representations in contrast to the blacks Gump befriends in Vietnam, the implicit message seems to be that blacks are okay in established institutions (like Bubba in the military or Bubba's family in the church--a church Gump builds for them) but are rendered highly suspect and volatile--even "dangerous"-- if they get too political or "extremist" in their actions. By circumscribing race within these institutional parametres, dominant (white male) power structures are maintained, and only those who embrace faith in God and country get affirmed.

By making Gump into a lucky idiot, the film is hugely and disturbingly successful in disguising its fundamental conservatism, a conservatism that gives way to the maudlin moralism of the film's final sequences. *Gump*'s banal attempts at racial transgressions are typical of the smugness germane to the film's "enlightened" attitudes, which is concealed by exploiting the comic potential of certain racial dichotomies--most notably, when Bubba's mom is finally served at her dinner table by a white woman. Though racially prescribed roles are reversed in this instance, no one pauses to ask: who made this possible in the first place? Rather than genuine transgressions, however, what is enacted in the film, I would argue, is a dominant heterosexual white male fantasy, for it is Gump, the hero of the film, who makes all these events possible, though he is never aware that he is doing so.

Though some of the "pleasure" of the film stems from the ostensible "apolitical"[156] nature of the characterization of Gump, Gump's silence allows other people's politics to be sampled, and it is in this way that the film is indeed highly political. Rather than focusing, however, on the specific historic events the film narrates, and the political implications of these narratives, I am more interested in the representation of the character who is given the task of the political voice in *Forrest Gump*. It is the one central *female* character in the film, Gump's childhood sweetheart Jenny, who is given this role. By turning Jenny into an

[156]Hanks has argued that "The film is non-political [. . .] and thus non-judgmental. [It] doesn't just celebrate survival, it celebrates the struggle" (*Time* August 1, 1994: 52). Given the film's narrative impulse, the final resolution it offers, and in light of Jeffords's thesis, I would be inclined to ask: Whose survival? Whose struggle?

emblem of the wayward youth of 60s culture, she is the singular character who suffers the "excesses" we associate with that era in American history, conforming to what Singer has identified as the "construction of the feminine as a site of erotic over-investment," a female character who remains for most of the film excluded from a "masculine" regime yet everywhere rearticulated within that system as a phantasmatic, fetishized object. Jenny functions then as a metonymy for the current gender relations in our post-liberation economy, the feminine represented as culturally "Other" to ward off anxiety about current power differentials to secure a masculine economy in an ever-changing social landscape. Significantly, there are some startling and telling discrepancies between the original Winston Groom novel and the subsequent Zemeckis film: "In the book, Forrest was just as naive but not quite so innocent or lucky; he has some sex, did some drugs and missed out on the nuclear family that in the movie Forrest finally gets to tend. *In pumping up Jenny's role*, screenwriter Eric Roth transferred all of Forrest's flaws--and most of the excesses American's committed in the 60s and 70s to her."[157]

One of the many functions of Vietnam narratives in contemporary American culture is, as Jeffords maintains, to:

> maintain and propagate an image of the feminine as multiple, varying, unpredictable, and consequently, threatening and contaminating. [. . .] The chief structure of these representations is [. . .] the opposition created between the multiple and contaminating feminine [. . .] and the unitary and immune masculine, the masculine that has remained single and consistent. [. . .] The principle difference between the terms portrayed by French feminist theories (the body as multiple, plural, undefinable) and Vietnam representation is a distinction between multiplicity and fragmentation, in other words, what is perceived by feminist theorists as a multiplicity to be embraced by women is portrayed by the masculine as a fragmentation of destruction.[158]

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[157]*Time* (August 1, 94: 52; italics added). Given the extremely high production costs of film-making, cinematic representation is, no doubt, exceedingly more difficult to sell to the American consumer, than, say, literature. With the economic stakes so high, why was it deemed economically necessary and commercially viable to represent Jenny in this way, and to render in the process Gump's innocence in such a totalized manner? Given the immense popularity of the film and its HUGE box-office revenues, such strategies were evidently efficacious.

[158]Jeffords 161-163.

The feminine, like AIDS, is presented as an unstable, multi-accentual signifier that poses a threat to the very social order itself. Jenny's portrayal as an embodiment of excess for fragmentation as a consequence of her indulgences, an over-investment of the feminine as "threat" to the maintenance of the masculine economy, displaces other considerations of contemporary sexual configurations: no one pauses to ask, for example, the effects of Jenny's sexual abuse, the violation of the patriarchal contract hinted at (but never revealed) in the early part of the film, which is clearly the root of her "problems." As if to secure further the narrative impulse toward the maintenance of autonomous masculine economy, the film necessities Jenny's marcescent death. After returning to the security of the paternal signifier (she eventually comes running back to the lovin' arms of Gump), she dies the *movie-disease-of-the-week*, leaving a good looking corpse and a brave husband who will carry on and prosper.

Like the character of Alex (Glenn Close) in *Fatal Attraction*, the death of Jenny and all that she has come to signify by this point functions to

> establish the familial economy as diegetic threshold, an image of stability designed to elicit an identifactory or desirous investment from the audience. It also works to position sexual threat as a force from without, and as a gratuitous, hence, unjustified, invasion by an alien or outsider, rather than as a dynamic operative within the family. By eliciting audience belief in the family's stability, the film mobilizes the audience's investments in the form of a desire for the restitution of the family and the organization of desire it represents.[159]

It is significant that Singer's comments here are contained in a text whose dominant theme is the age of epidemic, for though *Fatal Attraction* never broaches the issue of AIDS, the cultural logic of *dis*-ease pervasive in the current sexual economy allows for the articulation of questions about "epidemic" in spaces where they might not seem tenable, a situation equally applicable in my consideration of *Forrest Gump*: cleverly inverting the title of *Fatal Attraction*, Singer asks: "What is so attractive, at this particular time, about a film in which sexual attraction is also figured as fatal? For whom or what is attraction fatal, and

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[159]Singer 182.

what larger utilities are accommodated or recuperated thereby."[160] These questions provide a potent framework for consideration of the social-sexual configurations offered in *Forrest Gump*, even more so, perhaps, than *Fatal Attraction*, since *Forrest Gump* mischievously and deceptively invokes AIDS as threat in a way that *Fatal Attraction* does not.

What is the nature of Jenny's "attraction," and why is this attraction figured as "fatal" in the mobilization of pleasure in *Forrest Gump*? As a figure of feminine excess, an embodiment of "a threat from without," Jenny's death is a perfect and appropriate response for the current climate of sexuality in the age of AIDS, and is set up in opposition to the final resolution offered by the film.[161] Jenny's death in 1982 from a "mysterious virus" underscores a contemporary cultural condition prevalent two decades into the AIDS epidemic, and works as a strategy of displacement for reconfiguring *dis*-ease in order to offer a sense of security to the familial, monogamous ideal. One cannot help but invoke the specter of AIDS to explain Jenny's death, because she herself represents those sites of danger with which AIDS has always been associated: Jenny is seen throughout the film using IV needles for her drug addiction, and is rather open and free ("promiscuous") in her sexuality and the sexual pleasures she takes--the "excesses" we associate with the culture of

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[160]Singer 179.

[161]Not only is this plot similar to *Terms of Endearment*, which ends with the death of Debra Winger, but the representation of the death of Jenny by AIDS marks a dichotomy in the representational logic structuring the epidemic: heterosexuals (both male and female) are affected differently by AIDS than homosexuals, as if they die a completely different disease, excluded from the withering decay of the flesh that typifies the fate of the gay male body. Not only is the clandestine body of AIDS in *Forrest Gump* part of the film's deceptive moralistic strategies, it is also indicative of a homophobic representational system. One need only compare the death of Jenny with the death of Hank's character in *Philadelphia*, the former given a form of "discursive privacy" that the latter is not afforded. To further illustrate this dichotomy, NBC's TV-movie "Roommates," (May 30, 1994) was a veritable exercise in binary logic. The movie featured two men with AIDS, one gay, one straight, forced to share a room in an AIDS hospice. In addition to the stereotypical representation of gay and straight sexuality (the gay man is overly sensitive, small-boned, well-educated and well-dressed; the straight man is gruff, large and unkempt, and lacking in both social and intellectual skills), the movie attempts to propagate the myth that "AIDS affects us all," but as a consequence of its binary presentation of sexuality, it "carries a harmful subliminal message: that gay men die of AIDS, while straight men with the disease get only nasty headaches and a hard time from their friends at the pool hall" (*The Advocate* May 31, 1994: 74-74). Similarly, in HBO's *And The Band Played On*, the representation of the decaying, emaciated lesion-covered body of AIDS is deployed exclusively for gay white men, while everyone else--including Africans of both sexes and women in general--simply die, leaving a corpse relatively intact.

the sixties but that have become the fundamental taboos in the age of epidemic, those sites of danger inscribed on the collective consciousness in the post-liberation economy. More obviously, however, is the fact that the film simply deploys ample signifiers to support the argument of the presence of the threat of AIDS: the more attuned viewer, for example, will certainly realize that the date of Jenny's death in 1982 (signified on the calendar beside her death-bed and on her tombstone at the end of the film) of a mysterious virus just so happens to be the year prior to the "discovery" of HIV in 1983, the virus that causes AIDS.

By configuring Jenny's death in this way, we are again witness to the way in which AIDS (as "Other") is excluded from systems of discourse yet everywhere rearticulated within that system, the paradoxical nature of power mobilizing AIDS as a double operation of construction and erasure, so that discourse has the power to silence a disease that has never been fully spoken. This cultural logic conforms to Foucault's profound conjecture in *The History of Sexuality*, where he argues that we as a culture have committed ourselves to "the endlessly proliferating economy of the discourse of sex," but that "What is peculiar to modern societies is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the* secret."[162] Foucault's prescription is as equally applicable to the discourses of AIDS (which is, of course, always bound up with the economy of the discourse of sex), which function in this instance as a "screen-discourse," a "dispersion-avoidance," (Foucault[163]): everyone already knows what we are talking about; everyone already knows the stigmatized social field to which these representations respond. AIDS is proliferating on all levels of discourse yet we as culture are continuing to exploit it as the "secret," redistributing it in such a way that it need not be articulated.

The wink-wink, nudge-nudge epistemological wager offered by Jenny's death deploys a narrative of AIDS for the renegotiation of the familial structure of desire, the

[162]*The History of Sexuality* 35.
[163]*The History of Sexuality* 53.

mobilization of *dis*-ease as a site of power and knowledge for the conferral of traditional configurations of pleasure and power in an era of danger, and, as the final moments of the film will attest, for the reaffirmation of a masculine subject not worthy of contempt.[164] As we saw in *Philadelphia*, the (heterosexual) masculine subject in *Forrest Gump* is offered a form of "discursive privacy:" Jenny's father, for example, is never called upon to take responsibilities for his actions; nor is Gump ever characterized to acknowledge complicity with the events that unfold around him, rendering masculinity as an innocent and stable construct. Though Jenny is momentarily figured into the structure of the nuclear family, *her* mistakes can never be forgiven: from the very early moments of the film, Jenny was excluded from the familial economy, the daughter of a sexually abusive father who remains throughout her adult life a troubled "child" who seems to have no one but herself to blame. The film's existentialist philosophy (exemplified by the rampant individualism of Gump) dictates that Jenny's fate is her own destiny, and thus, by not implicating her father in the subsequent events of Jenny's life, masculinity is rendered innocent, whereas it is the feminine that must carry on the burdens of masculine transgressions.[165]

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[164]To read this scenario through the lens of Hanks's previous success, the presentation of Jenny's death is even more over-wrought with signification, almost cloying viz. his connection with AIDS and *Philadelphia*. Throughout the extra-textual discourses circulating around *Forrest Gump*, we are continually reminded of Hanks's impassioned speech at the 1994 Academy Awards, which was hailed as his call for compassion and understanding for those who have died of AIDS. But consistent with the current logic of *dis*-ease, not once has any one stopped to consider that in this speech the word "AIDS" was never mentioned, but was displaced in favour of more metaphoric and symbolic language. This silence is highlighted in a *US Magazine* interview with Hanks, in which the interviewer asks: "Some people thought your speech was over-wrought. Do you regret any of it?" To which Hanks responds: "Not a word. I knew the only thing I truly wanted to say was something germane to a more important aspect of why I was there--the level of the [AIDS] tragedy that has been going on is just too big" (parenthetical addition of "AIDS" by *US Magazine*). Everyone already knows what he's referring to; everyone already knows the "tragedy" of which he speaks. AIDS therefore not only can but should remain unspoken in these uncontested cultural spaces.

[165]The only other central female character in the film, Gump's mother (Sally Field), is presented in similarly dismal terms. Jeffords has argued that women in Vietnam narratives are perceived through a "prism of sexuality," that is, the representation of "difference" between men and women is marked exclusively in sexual terms in order to secure the masculine bond. Quoting Sedgwick, Jeffords notes that "in the presence of a woman who can be seen as pitiable or contemptible, men are able to exchange power and to confirm each other's values even in the context of the remaining inequalities in their power" (in Jeffords 64). In an early scene in the film, Gump's mother pleads with her son's school master to allow Gump in to regular classes, despite his extremely low IQ. Though she has been presented unquestionably as a strong and resourceful woman, able to provide a home for her son as a single mother in a time and place when this would have been not only scandalous (the American South in the 1950s) let alone extremely

As we saw in *Philadelphia*, over and against the construction of "high-risk" groups as sites of erotic danger is the over-investment of value of the familial economy as a "prophylactic social device," with the implication that "the nuclear family is the safest sex around," a panic logic which figures the familial unit as a site of vulnerability from whom protection against these very sites of danger is required; thus, the death of Jenny), which functions as a backdrop for "The deployment of hegemonic social structures by which male privilege as well as racial and class privileges are insidiously reasserted."[166]

Again, as Singer argues in her discussion of *Fatal Attraction*:

> Even though Alex is figured as threatening and therefore as an object of anxiety and/or contempt she is also made to seem attractive. In doing so, the film also works to eroticize and glamorize the threat she represents. Alex is a figure of sex laced with danger. For the audience, of course, this is pleasure at a safe distance. Such a figure is a very fitting one for the era of sexual epidemic, allowing for the appropriation of pleasure in danger, while at the same time promising that the threat it represents will also ultimately be contained, neutralized, or eliminated.[167]

The nature of Jenny's "fatal attraction," and the threat that that attraction poses for Gump and the masculine economy, is successfully contained, neutralized, and ultimately eliminated. Initially presented as a strong and independent woman, Jenny eventually succumbs to the "charms" of her life-long friend Forrest, pleading for his help as he plays the knight in shining armour to this damsel in distress.[168] Significantly, Jenny remains geographically distant from Gump throughout the entire course of the film, a relationship whose "pleasure" is nourished in Gump's imagination and that allows him to create "woman" in his own image. It is only when Jenny gives up her politics and abandons her

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difficult, her only choice in this situation is to spread her legs for the school master, a scene that generated great laughter and pleasure from the audience. But what is the purpose of this *smarmy* bit of sexual innuendo, and whose pleasure does it serve? It is, ultimately, an act of "charity" on behalf of this mother's son, offering up her body so that her son may thrive and prosper. But would she have done this for a daughter? And would it have produced the same results/pleasure?

[166]Butler, in Singer 7.

[167]Singer 186.

[168]"Wright's Jenny is a frail soul in a tail-spin, a battered child in a beautiful woman's body. And Forrest is her redeemer. The suspense of the movie is whether she will allow him to save her" (*Time* August 1,1994: 52). Given the primacy of these narratives in Hollywood film in general, the "suspense" of the film is negligible.

"excesses," once she no longer functions as the embodiment of "pleasure in danger" to the stability of the masculine economy, that Jenny can return and be brought together in "happy" union with Gump at the end of the film.

That masculine stability, however, must be explicitly understood as a manifestation and an extension of heterosexual privilege in a way that Jeffords's thesis on the remasculinization of America never really addresses. As Butler has convincingly argued:

> gender performativity cannot be theorized apart from the forcible and reiterative practice of regulatory sexual regimes [. . .] the regime of heterosexuality operates to circumscribe and contour the "materiality of sex," and that materiality is formed and sustained through and as a materialization of regulatory norms that are in part those of heterosexual hegemony.[169]

Though homosexuality is never broached in *Forrest Gump*, its glaring absence from the film only serves to strengthen the heterosexual imperative of the masculine bond and the general remasculinization of America. As Foucault writes: "Choosing not to recognize was yet another vagary of the will to truth."[170]The ways in which Hanks is constructed as the spokesman for the AIDS crisis (underscoring the heterosexual imperative even in this the site for the seeming renegotiation of hegemonic sexuality), and now as the embodiment of the new American male, foreshadow the current iconization of the figure of Gump, not as fictional construct performed by Hanks, but as the representative American man inseparable form Hanks's real life (heterosexual) status.

Jeffords argues that one of the principle functions of Vietnam narratives in contemporary culture is to

> narrate the Veteran, not only as a superior individual, but as a superior leader for society as a whole. His is a voice that can heal wounds, provide direction, offer commitments and fulfill promises. Vietnam veterans have traversed in these few years (1982-1987) from child to adolescent to father, from outside to leader, from destructive rebel to wise patriarch, from feminine to masculine.[171]

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[169]Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 15.
[170]*The History of Sexuality* 55.
[171]*The Remasculinization of America* 143.

As a Vietnam vet, Gump occupies at various stages throughout the film all of these positons, as the shift in Gump's character to weak and violated feminine to strong and in control masculine functions as the principle thrust behind the film's narrative. From his early years as a child scorned and humiliated for his physical and mental inadequacies to his ultimate continuation of the masculine bond signified by the birth of his son, Gump is shown in his capacity to "heal wounds" and "provide direction" (notably in his relationships with both Jenny and Lt. Dan) and can "offer commitments and fulfill promises" (as a shrimper, maintaining loyalty to the promise he made to Bubba prior to Bubba's death in Vietnam). But Gump's superior status as a leader of society as a whole goes beyond even what Jeffords has envisioned, for in the presentation of Gump there is an impulse toward godliness, the penultimate presentation of the masculine subject as a modern day Jesus or Isaah who can lead society out of the decay currently plaguing American life. For example, when a band of anonymous nobodies follows Gump on his cross-country jaunts, waiting breathlessly for his pronouncements, he is transformed into a caricature of Moses handing down the Ten Commandments; and then, as he announces he will stop running and turns back in the direction he came, he *is* Moses parting the Red Sea. What gets affirmed in these moments and elsewhere is Gump's devotion to God, country, and traditional family values, over and above the exclusion of all other political, social and sexual configurations of pleasure and power.

With the elimination of Jenny and the threat she posed as a figure of feminine excess, *Forrest Gump* is strategically positioned to end exactly where it began: a little boy (Gump's son) waiting to take the bus to school.[172] Though we have come full circle, there

[172]This circular structure is further underscored by the return of the white feather from the opening montage of the film. Hanks has said that director "Bob [Zemeckis] said from the beginning that our fate floats around on a breeze like a feather. I think that's probably the best definition of destiny one could come up with. It takes into consideration the theoretical chaos that is part and parcel of our world" (*US Magazine* 49). But *Forrest Gump* offers a rather different vision of destiny than this feather motif implies, for the "theoretical chaos" is ascribed only to the multivalent representation of the "Other" in the film. The white, heterosexual, traditionally-valued male is the only one in the film who survives (while everyone else around him dies), suggesting that the existentialist posturing in the treatment of the "Other," that one's fate is of one's own doing, is not a philosophy constituting the construction in popular discourse of the new American male, for masculinity, as *Forrest Gump* configures it, *is* destiny.

is one noticeable difference in this scene that was absent from the first: little Gump is rendered in the "spitting image" of his father but without the handicaps and mental deficiencies that plagued big Gump in his early years, as if to suggest that fatherhood has "cured" both Gump and his son of these deficiencies, eliminating the potential flaws by turning Gump into a paragon of paternal virtue.[173] And again, what is offered here is a form of "discursive privacy" to the masculine subject, which might in part account for the "pleasure" and "success" of this film: if Jenny did indeed die of AIDS, what does this mean for her son? Is he too infected? Of course, in the logic of the masculine bond, such a displacement is irrelevant in this context, for the circular structure of the film's narrative is successful in rendering the maintenance of an autonomous masculine economy, a singular and monolithic masculinity passed down from father to his male progeny.

In its production of the family as the ultimate site of safety in an age of sexual danger, and its joint investment in the construction of the monogamous, heterosexual male subject as the perfect vehicle of "prophylactic mediation" (Singer) for safe(r) sex, the film successfully disavows the inherent paradox of these cultural constructions, especially as they pertain to women in the sexual economy. The framing of Jenny's childhood within the paradigm of sexual abuse, and her subsequent death by AIDS (excess), serve to underscores what Singer identifies as the paradox of "safe sex" in the age of epidemic:

> What is particularly ironic and chilling about the latest campaign to market safe sex as the latest disciplinary innovation is the implicit

[173]Both Jeffords and Singer have located a current moment in cultural representation that is marked by a "fetishization of paternal activity" (Singer): "programs like 'Full House,' 'Paradise,' and 'You Again?' portray single fathers maintaining children and households" (Jeffords, *Remasculinization* xiv). "Hollywood has attempted to exploit conditions of unlikely parenthood for comic effect in *For Keeps* and *She's Having A Baby*, where the parents are teenagers, and the very popular *Three Men And A Baby*, which was an American remake of the French film *Three Men And A Cradle*, which was also very popular. Paternity/fatherhood is a source of interest, perhaps, because it is so exotic" (Singer 179). The most recent addition to this fetishization of paternal activity is Steve Martin's *A Simple Twist Of Fate*, in which Martin plays a divorced dad who finds himself the father of an adopted little girl. The trailers for this little piece of paternal propaganda poses the following questions: "How many sacrifices will he make? How much love can he give? How many problems can he take?" Similarly, Tom Hanks took on such a paternal role in *Sleepless in Seattle*, a widowed dad whose plight might account in part for Hanks's current popularity and benevolent status in American popular culture. Despite the claims of the ostensible universal theme of humanity and tolerance, *Forrest Gump* is, I would argue, more germane to this paternalistic genre than anything else.

> assumption that [. . .] sex was safe before AIDS. Sex was safe, it seems, as long as it was women who die for and from sex in childbirth, illegal abortions, faulty contraception, rape and murder at the hands of their sexual partners. [. . .] history reveals that the family has never been a particularly safe place for women and children.[174]

Over and against this paradox, over and against the consideration of other sites of vulnerability, the over-investment of value in the heterosexual masculine economy in the current epidemic assures that what gets affirmed is faith in God, country, and traditional family values, and that these cultural valorizations, as the film's immense success might indicate, are sufficient and tenable to ward off cultural anxiety in an increasingly uncertain sexual market place.

[174]Singer 68.

the wages of dying is love

--Galway Kinnell

CHAPTER FOUR:

"I KNOW, I KNOW, THAT I DON'T KNOW:"

EPISTEMOLOGICAL RESISTANCE IN *ZERO PATIENCE*

> Geography has mapped every river, every glade, yet we still have much to learn about the mysteries of AIDS. Let's explore this foreign body, learn the custom of its cells, classify its nooks and crannies, pull its chains and ring its bells. We will never find the cure 'til we isolate the source; once we know where it came from we can kill it off by force. What's the origin of this virus? Europe, Zaire, or Haiti? The clues are here before us, Patient Zero holds the key. Let's all be empiricists, victors of the mind, rulers of the stupid, leaders of the blind. An empire of knowledge, will conquer all the rot. A culture of certainty will put us back on top.
>
> --John Greyson, *Zero Patience*

> We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in tress, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much. All of aborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. [. . .] The tree and root inspire a sad image of thought that is forever imitating the multiple on the basis of a centred or segmented higher unity.
>
> --Deleuze and Guattari[175]

As the previous chapters might serve to illustrate, popular AIDS discourse does much to underscore our love of trees. Our insatiable desire to classify, label, map, chart, delimit, define and categorize in general presupposes that our epistemic responses to disease in particular will seek to locate and decipher the source and origin of contagion and the means and routes of infection. This was illustrated, for example, in the very establishment of the Krever Commission, which seeks to determine *how* over 1000 hemophiliacs were infected with HIV, and in the discourse of "tainted-blood" that this "scandal" has spawned, which might suggest the cultural configuration of the indissoluble association of homosexuality as the originating site of AIDS; and in the presentation of the homosexual body of AIDS and the inevitable avenues of infection as articulated in *Philadelphia*, a tendency for epistemological and ontological certainty in popular cultural practices operative perhaps under the logic of our love of trees.

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[175] *A Thousand Plateaus* 15.

As Patton has argued, "the rise of virologic and immunologic thinking about AIDS demonstrates how cultural metaphors about AIDS converge with scientific thinking."[176] In ways similar to the discursive formation of AIDS in popular cultural practices as outlined above, the tendency in the para-scientific discourses for epistemological mastery, the propensity for closure, necessitates an overarching concern with origin of this new viral infection, over and above means for preventative measures, vaccines, and cures; or the displacement of those "beneficent effects of power" (Singer)--the need for adequate social services to those who live and suffer with AIDS. As the privileged motif for the cultural narratives of AIDS, the tree indicates the degree to which scientific discourse dictates the course for more popular cultural representations and responses to the epidemic, suggesting a consistency among systems of discourse to valorize "genealogy" as the *modus operandi* of discursive formation. Moreover, in the current sexual economy, in the age of what Singer defines as epidemic, the tree, or genealogy, suggests an element of "certainty" against the essential "unknowability" of AIDS, a strategy under the logic of *dis*-ease that attempts to alleviate anxiety in an increasingly complex epistemological and epidemiological culture. As Treichler has noted: "In multiple, fragmentary, and often contradictory ways we struggle to achieve some sort of understanding of AIDS, a reality that is frightening, widely publicized, and yet finally neither directly nor fully knowable."[177] Or, as Edelman has more recently argued: "in the face of the epistemological ambiguity provoked by this epidemic, in the face of so powerful a representation of the force of what we do not know, the figure of certainty, of literality, is itself ideologically constructed and deployed as a defense, if not as a remedy."[178]

Not exclusive to our current episteme, scientific inquiries into disease in the past have similarly sought to answer questions of origin, and have produced social and cultural responses that bear little radical discontinuity to the discursive framing of AIDS in the

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[176]Patton, *Inventing AIDS* 58.
[177]"AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification" 31.
[178]Edelman 90.

present. In his historical excavation of the "iconography of disease," for example, Sander L. Gilman draws specific analogies between the outbreak of syphilis in the late fifteenth century to the nineteenth century and the emergence of AIDS in the contemporary socius:

> The desire to locate the origin of a disease is the desire to be assured that we are not at fault, that we have been *invaded from without, polluted by some external agent.* In the late fifteenth century, syphilis was first understood as resulting from the malevolent influence of the zodiac. But it quickly came to be linked to another major event of the 1490s, Columbus's voyages of discovery to the Americas. Syphilis was seen as society's *punishment for transgressing the God-given boundaries* of human endeavor, a divine scourge that punished Europe for the collapse of the feudal system, the rise of capitalism, and the desire to find new worlds to feed this new economic system. . . . the geographical locus of the disease shifted with time and circumstances. In the nineteenth century, during an age of expanded colonialism and black slavery, a new argument placed *the origin* of syphilis *in Africa*, prior to the voyage of Columbus. A similar story can be told about AIDS in the 1980s.[179]

As in the previous chapters, Gilman's comments here about the socio-historical responses to syphilis and their continuity with the cultural configurations of AIDS are remarkably consistent with some of the various writers already seen, from Douglas's thesis on "purity and danger" ("polluted by some external agent") and the threat that transgression poses to an established sense of order, and how this facilitated and framed the discourse of "tainted-blood;" to Singer's notion of the production and proliferation of sites of erotic danger or over-investment in the age of epidemic that are figured in cultural discourse as threats to the familial economy ("invaded from without"), the exemplary site for the stability of the social order itself.

Moreover, all of these comments, including Gilman's historical AIDS parallels, resonate with Foucault's polemic on the "plague" and the way in which technologies of power manipulate and control the body in times of epidemic in order to (re)establish a sense of order to the social system and to the bodies that constitute that very system. Foucault writes:

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[179]Sander L. Gilman, "AIDS and Syphilis: The Iconography of Disease," 100 (italics added).

> The Plague is met by order; its function is to sort out every possible confusion: that of disease, which is transmitted when bodies are mixed together; that of evil, which increased when fear and death overcome prohibitions. It lays down for each individual his place, his body, his disease and his death, his well-being [. . .] his "true" name, his "true" place, his "true" body, his "true" disease.[180]

The potency and viability of scientific investigations--and the popular para-scientific discourses these investigations produce--to shape and inform more popular culture practices in the representation of disease is evidenced, for example, in Randy Shilts's plague epic (cum journalism) *And The Band Played On*, and its cinematic version of the same name (produced for television by HBO). As a manifestation of erotic over-investment, Shilts's fetishization of Gaetan Dugas, popularly know as "Patient Zero"--the French-Canadian airline steward accused in the popular press of spreading AIDS throughout North America--underscores the need for closure in eras of epidemic, conveniently utilizing Dugas's sexual proclivities and extensive movement across continents for the cultural inscription and conferral of certainty in the age of epidemic. In his narrativization of Dugas's participation in the 1982 "Cluster Study," a study that traced the earliest cases of AIDS to Dugas and that subsequently was effective in determining HIV as a sexually transmitted virus, Shilts turns Patient Zero into a posthumous media celebrity, according him star-like status in such a way that reconfigures *dis*-ease within the paradigm of homosexual promiscuity with which AIDS has always already been figured.

Immediately following the announcement of Dugas's death on March 30, 1984, Shilts offers the following speculation:

> Whether Gaetan Dugas actually was the person who brought AIDS to North America remains a question of debate that is ultimately unanswerable. The fact that the first cases in both New York and Los Angeles could be linked to Gaetan, who was himself one of the first half-dozen or so patients on the continent, gives weight to that theory. Gaetan traveled frequently to France, the Western nation where the disease was most widespread before 1980. In any event, there's no doubt that Gaetan played a key role in spreading the new virus from one end of the United States to the other.[181]

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[180] *Discipline and Punish* 197-198.

[181] Shilts, *And The Band Played On* 439.

Singer has argued that "Within the framework of a logic of sexual epidemic, images of erotic access and mobility shift registers, from those associated with freedom, surplus, choice, recreation to those of anxiety, unregulated contact, and uncontrolled spread."[182] Specifically utilizing the proliferation of "erotic access and mobility" that marked the (pre-AIDS) "gay sexual revolution" of the late nineteen seventies and early eighties, Shilts himself is seduced by this cultural shift that now signifies erotic access and mobility not as a means toward freedom and choice but as an end in itself, the resultant effect of which is the cultural conferral of the inevitability of viral spread at the site of homosexuality rather than from unmediated sexual exchange. Despite the seductive nature of a Patient Zero as a site of sexual danger or erotic access,[183] Shilts fails to acknowledge that, by 1987, scientists had already identified cases of AIDS as far back as the late sixties, making the question of whether or not he "brought AIDS to North America" not just "unanswerable" but completely untenable.[184]

Many commentators have made trenchant criticisms of Shilts's book, specifically in relation to the untenable nature of viral origin represented in the presentation of Dugas.[185] I raise Shilts's text here to briefly underscore the seemingly seductive and potentially destructive nature of our fetish for tress, our desire to locate origin as a mechanism of certainty for the alleviation of cultural anxiety in the age of AIDS. Consistent with my thesis of *dis*-ease in general, however, this fetish for origin functions not only for the alleviation but also for the production of anxiety, and suggests again the paradoxical nature

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[182]Singer 28.

[183]Shilts's penchant for drama has produced such scenarios as the following: "Back in the bathhouse, when the moaning stopped, the young man rolled over on his back for a cigarette. Gaetan Dugas reached up for the lights, turning up the rheostat slowly so his partner's eyes would have time to adjust. He then made a point of eyeing the purple lesions on his chest. "Gay cancer," he said, almost as if he were talking to himself. "Maybe you'll get it too" (198).

[184]Dr. William Darrow, the scientist who conducted the 1982 "Cluster Study" with Dugas, has denounced Shilts's interpretation of these events, calling it a "misrepresentation of science."

[185]For example, Judith Williamson has argued: "While Shilts's book is rationally geared to blame the entire governmental system for failing to fund research, educate the public and treat those infected, he nevertheless cannot entirely resist the wish for a source of contamination to be found, and then blamed. If Patient Zero did not exist, we would need to invent him" ("Every Virus Tells A Story: The Meanings of HIV and AIDS" 73).

of discourse in a manner that is equally consistent with the notion of panic logic. For example, the recent film *Outbreak* (starring Dustin Hoffman, Donald Sutherland, Morgan Freeman), a Hollywood "thriller" about a virus, is directly shaped and informed not only by the course of scientific investigations, but mobilizes the anxieties constitutive of the age of epidemic for the veritable production or "outbreak" of new epidemic conditions, mobilizing the popular mythologies of AIDS for the incitement of panic. All the elements of AIDS are present in this Hollywood flick: much like HIV, the fictional "Motaba" virus in the film originates in a small African village; a monkey transports the virus from its originating site in Africa to America, from the "Dark Continent" to the Land of Liberty, where it is then transmitted to humans. Threatening to decimate the entire population of America (Canada and Mexico are strangely immune to this virus, despite our *fluid* borders) within forty eight hours, the virus leaves its "victims" with lesions similar to the KS lesions common with AIDS; the quarantining of the infected small California town is contemplated, much like the recommendation in the United States to lock up sero-positives as a preventive measure for further HIV-spread; even the sub-plot of *Outbreak* directly corresponds to the CIA AIDS-conspiracy theory, which suggested that the US government developed a viral infection now know as HIV as a strategy of germ warfare against unwanted or undesirable elements of society (specifically homosexual men, drug users, and the black urban poor, the groups hardest hit by AIDS in the early years), directly mimicked in the film with the presentation of the Army General (Sutherland), who wants the Motaba virus for similar genocidal purposes.

Underscoring the necessity of determining the origin of viral infection in an age of epidemic, and highlighting the ways in which the para-scientific discourses of AIDS shape and influence popular culture practices, Hoffman embarks on a typical Hollywood action-adventure, with spectacular chase sequences across the country in helicopters to locate the monkey and thus secure a vaccine for this new viral contaminant. In their desperate attempt

to find the monkey, these virus-avenging heroes articulate the self-important, all-America mantra: "The fate of the nation, perhaps the world, is in our hands."

The deployment of viral infection as cogent material for a Hollywood action flick is again evidence of the paradoxical nature of power, where the dominant myths of the disease are mobilized for the film's narrative impulse yet the disease itself remains the unspoken, unarticulated site for the incitement to panic logic, a "screen-discourse," or "dispersion avoidance" (Foucault) similar to the deceptive strategies of *dis*-ease in *Forrest Gump*. The cultural representation of epidemic conditions, the spawning or *outbreak* of new (and in this case fictional) epidemics in the age of AIDS, is, evidently, an economically profitable investment in late capitalist culture, *dis*-ease packaged and sold to consuming audiences as a lucrative cultural commodity: *Outbreak* "shot to first place on its opening weekend, grossing $13.4 million" (US).[186]

As if to confirm the current cultural milieu as one of epidemic, the *Globe and Mail* writes:

> *Outbreak* comes with a timely [. . .] premise. Viruses are definitely in the air these days--these microscopic time bombs have replaced the nuclear variety as the central repository of our apocalyptic fears. As the millennium approaches, with modern medicine looking ever more cash-starved and vulnerable, doomsayers point to the plague that is AIDS, to exotic flesh-eating microbes, to penicillin's fading powers, and predict that we'll meet our end not with a big bang but with a whimper.[187]

The easily shifting registers of disease in the age of epidemic (the conflation here of AIDS, which has killed hundreds of thousands, and "flesh-eating microbes," which have killed dozens and are not exclusively fatal) would seem to confirm the potential marketability of panic logic, spurred on, no doubt, by the increasing incitement to AIDS discourse and the proliferation of HIV-infection in the contemporary socius.

Against the violence of these discourses; against the proliferation of sites of *dis*-ease in the cultural logic of epidemic; and against the production of epistemological certainty as a

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[186] *Globe and Mail* (15 March 95/A10).

[187] "The Hollywood Virus," *Globe and Mail* (10 March 95/A12).

strategy of closure in the age of AIDS, certain counter-discursive narratives or "reverse-discourses" of AIDS have been facilitated by these very representations. As Singer makes clear in the theoretical impulse of her text, as one begins to investigate and interrogate the disciplinary modes of power in the discursive representational economy of AIDS, one necessarily begins to move outside these signifying practices to consider "the kinds of resistances that they can occasion and spawn."[188] It is to these kinds of resistances that I would like now to turn.

As mentioned in the introduction, Foucault's notion of "reverse-discourse" is never adequately theorized or put into practice, and for this reason, I will end this project with a brief consideration of John Greyson's *Zero Patience* (1993), not necessarily as a reverse-discourse but as a kind of Deleuzian exercise in "nomad thought." As a direct contestation of notions of origin and certainty characterizing the discursive formation of AIDS and the "suffering" caused by trees, Greyson's film explicitly resists epistemological mastery, problematizing our "aborescent culture" in the interests of radical political intervention. "The modus operandi of nomad thought is affirmation, even when its apparent object is negative."[189] In a cultural text on AIDS that is provocatively subtitled "A Movie Musical," *Zero Patience* is, I would argue, not just a "reverse-discourse" in the Foucauldian sense, but a veritable exercise in nomadic affirmation that maneuvers skillfully and playfully through critiques of representation and the media sensationalism of AIDS in order to get beyond the critical logic of binary thinking. As Steven Shaviro has argued in *The Cinematic Body*:

> Deleuze and Guattari [. . .] argue [. . .] that it is insufficient merely to contest the abusive nature of patriarchal structures of sexual representation. Too much has already been conceded to the forces of patriarchal order when representation is accepted as the battlefield. It is necessary to go further, to discover the conflicting forces. [190]

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[188]Butler, in Singer 4.

[189]Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia* xi.

[190]Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* 22.

In order to unearth these "conflicting forces," Greyson highlights both the implications when subjects become "objects of knowledge" in cultural practices but also underscores the possibility and the reality that subjects can and do engage *qua* subjects, not just objects but *creators* of a discourse, social agents capable of articulating individual experiences of subjectivity through specific cultural practices. In so doing, Greyson posits a strategy for the representation of difference that ultimately makes a difference, reconfiguring *dis*-ease to alleviate rather than produce the cultural anxieties that have been proliferated by the penchant for definitional and categorical certainty in the various medical and popular discourses of AIDS. As Kass Banning has so eloquently stated, "Constant metamorphoses, epitomized in the exquisite choreographed bodies in motion, forms corporeal resistance against the weight of definition. [. . .] *Zero Patience* teaches us that the inexorable drive for truth can kill us."[191]

Through the story of the relationship between the nineteenth century sexologist and explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton and Gaetan Dugas (know clinically and popularly as "Patient Zero," the star of Shilts's novel), Greyson takes us on a quintessentially queer and campy journey (the genre of the musical is the epitome of camp!) through various epistemes, with the revolutionary political goal of liberating Patient Zero from the fate that has been bestowed upon him in the popular imaginary--a fate, not doubt, tied up with our fetish for trees, for origin. When Burton, a researcher at the Natural History Museum is pressed by his boss Dr. Placebo to find a spectacular centre-piece for Burton's exhibition concerning diseases throughout the ages--aptly titled "The Hall of Contagion"--he comes across Patient Zero, from the recently distant AIDS epidemic. With the return of Zero, now only visible to Burton as a ghost from the past who comes to "haunt" Burton's project, the plot of *Zero Patience* is set in motion; as Burton and Zero become romantically involved, Zero convinces Burton of the ridiculousness and implausibility of the specific

[191]Kass Banning, "What's Love, Science and Singing Got To Do With It," *cineACTION* (February 1994): 62.

cultural (re)configuration of AIDS in the historical display Burton is constructing, pleading with Burton to "tell a tale, save my life, a life I could have had, just like Scheherazade." Like Scheherazade from Burton's own historical writing, Zero insists on the telling of stories to keep his memory alive and to exonerate him from blame, seducing Burton with his body much like Scheherazade, who seduces with her dance of the seven veils.

In keeping with the intentional destabalizing logic of the film, fiction and fact, past and present, are intricately woven together, producing a "docu-drama" on AIDS that rejects the standard documentary impulse for narratives that presuppose a history of meaning contingent on notions of authenticated "truth" based on empirical observation (Let's all be Empiricists"). In honouring the place of story ("tell a tale, save my life"), *Zero Patience* underscores the double identity of historical narration as a melange of "fact" *and* "story," and suggests that the present is always already (re)written through the historical screen of the past--as evidenced in the historical narratives of AIDS.

In the opening sequence of the film, for example, Burton, having discovered the existence of Patient Zero, bursts into song, setting up the dominant motifs endemic to the para-scientific discourses of AIDS that Greyson will then problematize and ultimately dismantle. With stereotypical British upittyness, Burton sings:

> Let's all be Empiricist, victors of the brain. Through our wit and brilliance, we can know the world again. Classify and label. Find the answers out. A culture of certainty will banish every doubt. Geography has mapped every river, every glade, yet we still have much to learn about the mysteries of AIDS. Let's explore this foreign body, learn the customs of its cells. Classify its nooks and crannies, pull its chains and ring its bells. We will never find the cure till we isolate the source. Once we know where it came from, we can kill it off by force. What's the origin of this virus? Europe, Zaire, or Haiti? The clues are here before us, Patient Zero holds the key. Let's all be empiricists, victors of the mind. Rulers of the stupid, leaders of the blind. An Empire of knowledge, will conquer all the rot. A culture of certainty will put us back on top.

Burton as scientist and explorer (empiricism and imperialism doubly engaged) sardonically desires to map and chart the body of AIDS in a way analogous to the mapping of geographical terrain, a cartography of the body of AIDS ironically presented in the film as a

direct challenge to what Edelman identifies as the deployment of "certainty" as remedy, if not a cure, or as a rejection by Greyson of the "anthropomorphic representation of sex" that Deleuze and Guattari rally against.[192]

Against this culture of certainty, Greyson seeks specifically to destabilize three central mythological constructions of the originating sites of AIDS: (1) the "myth" of Patient Zero, and the cultural configurations of all that he signifies; (2) the "myth" of the African Green Monkey, and all that is signified by its originating site in Africa; (3) and the "myth" of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) itself, the focal point for all medical research on AIDS. In problematizing the desire for origin and blame embedded in the cultural (over) investments of value in these three "myths" (within which HIV is still codified), Greyson successfully poses the implicit that has animated much of my own investigations in the previous chapters: whose pleasure and/or power are served by these narrative framings of AIDS?

Cleverly troping the title assigned to the real Gaetan Dugas ("Patient Zero"), Greyson theatricalizes political rage by way of a semantic shift, entitling his "musical" about AIDS by stressing the importance of political immediacy in the social and medical responses to the epidemic--"we've got *zero patience*", suggesting that time is not a luxury for people with AIDS, and demonstrating the continual frustration in the face of the cultural construction and distribution of certainty, exemplified, for example, in Shilts's text, with which *Zero Patience* is directly engaged. Questioning why our culture needs a Patient Zero in the first place, Greyson is not directly criticizing the 1982 Cluster Study as outlined by Shilts, for, as the film makes clear, the study was never intended to establish a "first infectious agent."[193] Greyson argues that:

> In our film, we never deny that Patient Zero was promiscuous. We don't really think that's important. Lots of people, gay and straight, are promiscuous. We are much more interested in why society needs a Patient Zero, a scapegoat that they can distance themselves from

[192]Deleuze and Guattari

[193]"The Zero Tabloid," Cineplex-Odeon Films

> [self vs. other?]. The film refuses to treat Patient Zero as a pariah--it tries to reclaim him, warts and all, as one of us.[194]

The second myth of "origin" *Zero Patience* investigates and interrogates is the epidemiological theory of the Africa Green monkey, who was charged with transmitting a simian virus to humans that mutated into HIV. In 1985, a virus in the African Green monkey was isolated, and from this it was hypothesized that AIDS was a long-standing African disease which originated in monkeys, spread to humans, and then, like the Village People, was urged to "Go West," a theory that was subsequently recanted when scientists admitted no connection between HIV and the phantasmatic notion of origin in Africa. Though it was discounted, this naturalistic taxonomy is a seductive metaphor for mobilizing the racial and sexual "Other" for the cultural reconfiguration of *dis*-ease within pre-existing power-knowledge relations.[195]

As Deleuze and Guattari suggest:

> evolutionary schema may be forced to abandon the old model of the tree and descent. Under certain conditions, a virus can connect to germ cells and transmit itself as the cellular gene of a complex species; moreover, it can take flight, move into the cells of an entirely different species, but not without bringing with it "genetic information" from its host. [. . .] We evolve and die more from our polymorphous and rhizomatic flus than from hereditary diseases, or diseases that have their own line of descent.[196]

The evolutionary schema informing the debates around AIDS/HIV suggest a virus taking flight and moving into the cells of an entirely different species, from animal to human, and then, "viral infection" carrying with it "genetic information" from its host, it moves from

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[194]qtd. in "The Zero Tabloid" (parenthesis added).

[195]See, for example, James Miller, "Aparth-AIDS: Racism, Rushton, and Ritual Censorship." Offering an analysis of the ways in which the popular discourses of AIDS have been utilized to reinscribe essentialist and racist assumptions of the sexual potency of the African male, Miller quotes extensively from University of Western Ontario psychologist Philippe Rushton's infamous and controversial text "Population Differences in Susceptibility to AIDS: An Evolutionary Analysis," (*Social Sciences And Medicine* 28, No.12, 1989 1211-1220). Miller makes such sardonic critiques as the following: "Rushton calmly notes (without a trace of irony) the penchant of black Africans to invent erotic animal dances 'which emphasize undulating rhythms and mock copulations'. Far from merely confirming the old honkey assumption that blacks are good at dirty dancin' because 'they'z juss natchully got rhythm', this sinister line of argument effectively supports the deeper racist fantasy that blacks are inevitably drawn to animal behaviour, jivin' and hustlin' their way to intercourse just like animals in heat, because that's what they really are. Clearly what underlies AIDS is not HIV-infection but jungle fever" (54).

[196]Deleuze and Guattari 10-11.

the originating and stigmatized site in "The *Dark* Continent" (and the attendant connotations of "dark" in this new era of "danger") to infect the equally stigmatized body of the promiscuous homosexual male (exemplified by Zero), both ostensibly possessing a genetic predisposition that would satisfy the demands of a culture of certainty.

The third and final myth Greyson goes on to confront is the virus "HIV" itself, considered by many but questioned by some as the sole "cause" of AIDS--a "fact" that has never been proven but remains the predominant focus of scientific research and popular perceptions of the disease. The skepticism that HIV alone could be capable of dismantling immune functioning--usually a rather resilient structure in the human body--has reigned since the discovery of HIV in 1983, but the culture of certainty assures that HIV, like Zero and the African Green Monkey before it, remains the centre-piece for scientific investigations and for popular discourses of the epidemic (exemplified, for example, in the continual collapsing of distinction between the two acronyms HIV and AIDS, as in the common yet erroneous term "the AIDS virus"). While Burton and Zero are examining a slide of Zero's blood in a microscope, the image seen through the periscope burst to life (in typical musical flourish), with (the late) AIDS activist Michael Callen (who also appeared in *Philadelphia*), now bearing an uncanny resemblance to that icon of queer sensibility, Barbra Streisand, literally floating into the scene (on an inflatable water-toy) as "Miss HIV," urging us to question her role as the exclusive factor responsible for the onset of AIDS and the destruction of individual immune functioning. In a scene more typical of a late-night drag spectacle at L'Entre-Peau than a scientific discourse on "the cause of AIDS," Greyson theatricalizes the discourse of the para-sciences to introduce other possibilities into the debate--literally, the voices of the Clichettes, more formally known as CMV and Syphilis, which are considered by some to be AIDS co-factors. Holding a note longer than the divine Babs herself, Miss HIV pleads with Burton to "Tell a story of a virus, of Greed, ambition and fraud, a case of science gone mad. Tell a tale of friends we miss, a tale that's cruel and sad. Weep for me, Scheherazade. Weep for me, Scheherazade." Like Zero, Miss

HIV invokes the specter of Scheherazade, insisting on the telling of stories as a life-affirming gesture, a micro counter-discursive narrative in the ever expanding field of AIDS discourse and representation. With Zero by his side during this epidemiological epiphany, Burton ultimately becomes convinced by the words of Miss HIV, and decides to transform his display at The Hall of Contagion to repudiate these dominant discourses of AIDS, and a whole set of orthodoxies in scientific practice that have secured themselves as fact in the popular imaginary.

In doing so, the film moves beyond critiques of the discursive formation of the AIDS epidemic to embark on an historic documentation of the treatment of diseases across an historical spectrum. In drawing historical analogies in a way similar to the comments raised in relation to Gilman and his work on syphilis quoted earlier, Greyson establishes that

> The science of AIDS, despite all its high-tech sophistication, is hopelessly mired in Victorian concepts of diseased sexuality. Just about everything we think we know about this epidemic has been built on a foundation of 19th century prejudices about queers, junkies, Africans, prostitutes, you name it. For me, Burton is a wonderful vehicle for exploring such issues.[197]

To underscore the argument that social and cultural responses to AIDS are not in themselves unique to our episteme, but rather, are a variation on lingering puritan attitudes about sexuality in general, The Hall of Contagion at the Natural History Museum represents historically "fixed" figures from various historical eras and transforms them from the clinical and dusty figures typical of the diorama into vibrant and productive members who have substantially contributed to the periods in which they lived. For example, Typhoid Mary is transfigured into Fanny Wright, a nineteenth century feminist and activist for the People's Health Movement. Similarly, the Tuskegee diorama turns into the figure of George Washington Carver, a black botanist and teacher.[198] By historicizing these persecuted figures into the present context of AIDS, the figure of Zero and all that he

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[197]"The Zero Tabloid" 3

[198]Banning 61.

has come to signify is similarly configured within historic concepts of sexuality that are complicit in the social configurations of AIDS in the current sexual economy, breaking down the rigid historical boundaries to mark continuity between past and present.

"Everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs, successive lateral offshoots in immediate connection with an outside."[199] As a lateral offshoot, Greyson's radical queer politics manifested in *Zero Patience* avoids a simplistic and linear critique of hegemonic social formations of pleasure and power in the age of AIDS, taking successive "lines of flight" from these potentially debilitating institutions and ideologies. Immediately connected to an outside (the grass-roots activism the film espouses), *Zero Patience* employs a queer and campy political aesthetic to move beyond the binary, oppositional logic of cultural activism to render problematic "marginal" responses to the epidemic. As Banning has noted of Greyson's earlier works, there is a decidedly political agenda that does not "blindly celebrate marginal practices; the naive supposition that alternative media can counter dominant culture is often parodied. *The necessity to move beyond the merely oppositional* gradually comes into expression."[200] The same might be argued of *Zero Patience*, Greyson's first feature-length film. As a scholar/film-video-maker/activist, Greyson's project provides an intersection of a multivalence of competing discourses against the linearity of the popular discursive formation of AIDS.

Greyson himself has unapologetically stated that:

> AIDS has lowered a shroud of depression over the past decade. Outrageous humour has become a necessary tactic of fighting back. I wanted to celebrate the wit and passion of everyone who is living with this disease, and of the friends I miss who have died from it. *Zero Patience* is a film about the gay experience of this epidemic: our courage, our fears, our humour, and our outrageousness. If that's a scandal, then let's be scandalous.[201]

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[199] Deleuze and Guattari 19.

[200] Banning 60; italics added.

[201] Greyson, qtd. in "The Zero Tabloid"

Greyson's deployment of outrageous humour--his seemingly "inappropriate" use of the musical format for dealing with the devastating social and psychic realities of AIDS, that is, the narrativization of a cultural and social condition in a way that would ostensibly seem to demand its exact opposite presentation--is effective for the very reasons such an approach would seem to thwart. As Butler has convincingly argued:

> The increasing theatricalization of political rage in response to the killing inattention of public policy-makers on the issue of AIDS is allegorized in the recontextualization of "queer" from its place within a homophobic strategy of abjection and annihilation to an insistent and public severing of that interpellation from the effect of shame. To the extent that shame is produced as the stigma not only of AIDS, but also of queerness, where the latter is understood through homophobic causalities as the "cause" and "manifestation" of the illness, theatrical rage is part of the public resistance to that interpellation of shame. Mobilized by the injuries of homophobia, theatrical rage reiterates those injuries precisely through an "acting out," one that does not merely repeat or recite those injuries, but that also deploys a hyperbolic display of death and injury to overwhelm the epistemic resistance to AIDS and to the graphics of suffering.[202]

The use of humour and camp for the theatricalization of rage manifests itself quite evidently in the historic critiques of the epistemic responses to AIDS that drive *Zero Patience*'s narrative, suggesting, perhaps, the cultural reconfiguration of that which is "scandalous" about AIDS. But Greyson does not restrict himself to an analysis of the discourses of AIDS in terms of the technologies of power that control and constrain bodies in times of epidemic; rather, he facilitates in *Zero Patience* a counter-discursive turn where subjects become subjects of their own discourse. As if to insist on a "severing of that interpellation from the effect of shame" that Butler suggests is a consequence of the stigma not only of AIDS but also of homosexuality, Greyson theatricalizes rage to "overwhelm the epistemic resistance to AIDS" by severing the stigma attached to gay male erotic practices as the "cause" and "manifestation" of that illness. He does so not by dismantling the external social forces of production of that shame, but by reconfiguring that "shame" in the context of the specific erotic practices gay men engage in. In a hyperbolic sequence simply entitled

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[202]Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 233.

"The Butthole Duet," the assholes of Burton and Zero literally come to life, engaging in some pre-coital pillow talk:

> (Burton): I'll tell you I'm no expert, I'm hardly one to talk, getting poked is problematic, I'm not crazy 'bout cock. (Zero): You don't like getting fucked? I haven't heard that before. One asshole to another, it's the thing I most adore.(B): In theory, it's no problem, but in practice it's a pain. According to my research, it's a common gay refrain. (Z): The Law of the Father doesn't recognize the hole. (Both): The phallus is the ruler, it's the cock whose in control. (Burton): That makes me juvenile, I'm a polymorphous mess. Oedipus is weeping, when my butt I do caress. I lie down and think of England. Toot that horn and bang that drum. It's an insult to the Empire, when I take it up the bum. (Z): Sex is not for Queen and Country, you don't need to rant and rave. *Sodomy ain't so symbolic, and you're rectum ain't a gra*[illegible].(B): But Freud said we have a death wish. Getting buggered is getting killed. Is this ghastly epidemic something our subconscious willed? (Z): An asshole's just an asshole, skip the analytic crit. The meanings are straight-forward. Cocks go in and out comes shit.

Watney suggested early on the need to develop and circulate images that "eroticize" safe(r) sex practices, against the disciplinary effects of the sexual configurations of those stigmatized pleasures always already associated with AIDS.[203] While not necessarily "erotic" in its presentation (the scene is more akin to watching the Muppets from hitherto unseen perspectives than gay male erotica), Greyson's "Butthole Duet" engages and effectively critiques not only the para-scientific and popular discourses of AIDS that permit that interpellation of shame, but also with contemporary critical issues in AIDS scholarship, making a direct allusion to Watney's phrase from *Policing Desire* that "Aids offers a new sign for the symbolic machinery of repression, making the rectum a grave."[204] In an attempt to move beyond binary thinking, Greyson is problematizing perhaps the seemingly totalizing effect of power (or "repression") of discourse or representation, suggesting that we are not exclusively chained to these discursive systems, that we have *power* as agents to

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[203]Watney writes: "Changes in sexual behaviour cannot be forced, they can only be achieved through consent, consent which incorporates change into the very structure of sexual fantasy. Hence the urgent, the desperate need to eroticise information about safe sex, if tens of thousands of more lives are not to be cruelly sacrificed on the twin alters of prudery and homophobia" (*Policing Desire* 129).

[204]*Policing Desire* 126.

get outside this symbolic machinery in a way that a Foucauldian analysis of the body is incapable of addressing.

As if to underscore that very limitation, Leo Bersani, in his well-known essay "Is the Rectum A Grave?," has similarly taken the cue from the original phrase by Watney to argue:

> If the rectum is the grave in which the masculine ideal (an ideal shared--differently--by men *and* women) of proud subjectivity is buried, then it should be celebrated for its very potential for death.[. . .] It may, finally, be in the gay man's rectum that he demolishes his own perhaps otherwise uncontrollable identification with a murderous judgement against him.[205]

Greyson's "The Butthole Duet" similarly alludes to this passage, where Bersani is making the claim that the symbolic resonance of the image of a grown man, "legs high in the air," enjoying the "suicidal ecstasy" of passive anal penetration is a cogent and potent signifier for effecting a disruption and dissolution of hegemonic formulations of sexual pleasure, a severing from the effect of shame that Bersani believes would further allow men to relinquish an imaginary relationship with the phallus ("the masculine ideal"). Specifically addressing the social and psychic consequences of one man being anally penetrated by another, Bersani necessarily focuses attention on the psychic terrain of real bodies in the real world, of actual physical relations of our bodies with the bodies of others--what he calls a "reflection on the phantasmatic potential of the human body," or an understanding of the "shifting experience that every human being has of his or her body's capacity, or failure, to control and manipulate the world beyond the self"[206] that directly problematizes a Foucauldian approach to the body (the body as passive inscription of signification) in the age of AIDS. Despite the seductive nature of his claims, despite the potency of his "organ-realism," I have always been uneasy in the face of Bersani's provocative text, and his psychoanalytic fetishizing of Watney's phrase, troubled by what I perceive as the over-investment of value in the singular sexual act of anal penetration that is always already

[205]Bersani 222.
[206]Bersani 216.

viewed from a position of hegemonic construction of pleasure and power in the first place.[207]

Whether or not Greyson is explicitly critiquing Bersani's text I cannot say, but he is, in his own campy way, quite evidently rejecting the psychoanalytic and

> metaphysical assumption that the body is somehow prior to history, outside politics . [. . .] To the contrary [. . .] the opposition between the ideological and the cultural is a false one, for the pre-Oedipal, pre-Symbolic infantile body is already steeped in and invested by culture. It is a question of learning to analyze the politics of the regulation of bodies, and the distribution of pleasures and pains: a politics more fundamental than the one located in the structural constraints and rationalizing processes of law and ideology.[208]

Although *Zero Patience* "remains overarchingly Foucauldian,"[209] Greyson moves beyond the merely oppositional, beyond *the body as the site of passive inscription of signification* , or as culturally "Other," in a way that perhaps would problematize the approach I have taken in the preceding chapters. In his attempt to articulate the capacity of subjects *qua* subjects, Greyson poignantly offers us in *Zero Patience* the character of George, a grade-school teacher and old friend of Zero's who is now battling the onset of AIDS-related illnesses, serving as the embodiment of how frustrating and painful the proliferation of discourses of the epidemic can be for one who is too busy and too tired just trying to stay alive. From his critiques of the para-scientific discourse on AIDS drugs to his dissatisfaction and frustration with the cultural and social activism of his own friends and community,[210] George offers a playful and moving narrative on the authoritative nature of the discourse of AIDS the film outlines, and how AIDS activism can similarly be seduced by such trenchant metaphors of certainty.

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[207]This is not the place to go into a lengthy discussion of psychoanalytic models of the body and AIDS. For a fuller discussion of these issues and the problems I have with Bersani's text, see my essay "Between A Cock And A Hard Place: Toward an Epistemology of the Body in the Age of AIDS," *Social Discourse/Discour Social* 6. 3/4 (Summer/Autumn 1994): 17-32. See also the last chapter of Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, "A Woman's Soul Enclosed in a Man's Body: Femininity in Male Homosexuality" (339-388), which makes dense yet provocative use of Bersani's text.

[208]Shaviro 58.

[209]Banning 62.

[210]As Banning has argued: "Auto-critique such as this, targeted to one's own community, is indeed courageous, and, I think, one of the film's strengths" (61).

In his song "Positive, " George effects a semantic shift, employing a term that has become a central motif in the lives of gay men ("positive" as a marker of sero-status) to offer a hermeneutics of suffering (without recourse to the subject as "victim") and to underscore how very little "we" "know" "about" "AIDS," moving away from the singular signification of "positive" as indicative of sero-status, and as death-sentence, to highlight the multivalence of signification of AIDS discourse, and the very "real" effect of these discourses on individual subjectivity. While George sings in the shower, he is repeatedly intercut in a scene where he is teaching his French class to conjugate for the verb "savoir" (to know); in the process, George also teaches *us* that the definitions and categories that have been cemented in the discursive formation of the epidemic provide little comfort for those who are suffering as a consequence of the essential "unknowability of AIDS," an unknowability that is frightening but which both George and *Zero Patience* emphatically embrace. These lines serve as the resounding refrain for the entire impetus of the film, and for the kinds of resistances necessary in the face of the ever-expanding social and cultural landscape of AIDS:

> (Kids): I know I know I know that I don't know. (George): I want to know. (K): Je sais je sais je sais que je ne sais pas. (G): Je veux savoir. She says the drug is a killer. He says it's a wonderful cure. They all say they're certainly certain. And I say nothing's for sure. She says I can stay healthy. He says I'm going to die in a year. They're positive that I'm positive. So far that's all that is clear. They're positive that I'm positive. They're sure that these doubts are a curse, I'm supposed to be certainly certain. Well I'm sure I'm getting worse. I'm positive I'm here, I'm positive I care, I'm positive that there's nothing to be sure of. I'm positive I'm positive I'm positive I'm alive. I'm positive that I'm going to die . . . sometime.

The crisis of engulfment can come from a wound, but also from a fusion: we die together from loving each other

--Roland Barthes

CONCLUSION:

AIDS, AIDS, GO AWAY,

COME AGAIN AN(OTHER) WAY!

On a recent train trip back to Montreal from Toronto, I was confronted by my traveling companion in the seat beside me with the tenuous nature of gay identity in the nineteen nineties. Wanting to chat to while away the time (something I generally dislike having to do when traveling by train), my new friend seemed intent on getting to know more about me than I was in the mood to relate. After some casual introductory exchanges and some unsolicited probing, I was asked by this complete stranger if I had a girlfriend "waiting for me" back home in Montreal. To which I answered simply that I did not. Her insistence that it was surprising and unfortunate that a young, intelligent man like myself (as she described me) did not have a girlfriend ultimately necessitated that I tell her the reason: "I don't sleep with women," I said. To which she responded approvingly, though in hushed tones: "Oh, ya know, one of my best friends has 'the AIDS.' " Resentful that in 1995 I was put in such a position to begin with, that I had to "defend" my "position" against her presumption of heterosexuality (what about *my* "discursive privacy"?), and distraught with my own inhibitions and hesitations about making such a declaration to someone I did not know, I became increasingly angered by this woman's response. It was as if I had just "confessed" not that I am gay but that I am dying of AIDS. My somewhat evasive intimation of my sexuality ("I don't sleep with women") was greeted with a sympathetic ear, *vis-à-vis* the identifactory relationship I elicited for this woman with her friend who has "the AIDS," a gesture, no doubt, in good faith in this woman's mind, but which raised many problems for me.

Another scenario: Recently, my father took out an extension on my life insurance policy. He mailed me the forms so that I could sign on the dotted line. Everything else had already been filled out, including the section asking if the applicant (me) has ever tested

positive for the "AIDS virus." My father took the liberty of completing this section without first consulting me, inscribing a definitive "X" in the box marked "NO." This despite the fact that I have never discussed my HIV status in particular or AIDS in general with my father. Why, I ask myself, was I so angered by my father's response? What did I think had been taken away from me by such a gesture? Certainly I could not have been demanding my "right" to be HIV positive? Nor, I thought, could I be desirous of having my father assume I am infected just because I am gay? But perhaps I was? Ultimately, I think what angered me was my father's presumption of "innocence" as a result of his lack of knowledge and understanding of me and my life in general (the father-son rift) that goes much, much deeper than the issue of AIDS, which is not to deny, however, that AIDS *is* what prompted my concern here in the first place.

These seemingly small and insignificant personal scenarios highlight two of the central tensions I have attempted to address in the preceding pages: (1) the continual and uncritical collapsing of distinction between homosexuality and AIDS, and (2) the paradoxical nature by which we as a culture are proliferating the discourses of AIDS yet continuing to exploit it as "the secret." Like the EverReady bunny, this present project could keep going and going and going. I cannot pick up the newspaper or turn on the television without reading or hearing about AIDS, and I cannot resist the impulse to "do something" with these cultural texts. And yet, "the AIDS" is still whispered in public for fear of the reprisal or the uncertain glances of the other passengers on the train . . . or the patrons in the restaurant . . . or the shoppers in the mall . . . or the grandparents in the public park . . . or wherever others happen to be. And yet, though a man like my father who reads the paper everyday and who believes that NewsWorld and CNN are the only programs on television worth watching--and would, therefore, have repeated exposure to the discourses of AIDS--it would never occur to him nor could he muster the courage to ask his sexually active twenty six year old son if he has ever been tested for HIV. And

neither could I muster the courage to challenge him to assess why I might find his uniformed declaration of my HIV status problematic and unsettling.

What I am suggesting here is that there exists both strategic silences and unconscious semantic interventions in our social, cultural, and personal responses to the reality of AIDS in our current episteme, and that this paradoxical tension (silence versus speech as co-participants in the communicative process) brings us to the very limits of language, of discourse. There are some things that just cannot be accounted for, things which necessarily exceed and escape the text.

Pain, for instance. As Elaine Scarry has written, "pain resists verbal objectification."[211] So too with AIDS, which is always already indissolubly bound to an economy of pain. That the threshold of language is reached when the body is in pain marks the inherent limitations of a political project spoken through the axioms of cultural theory.

The strategic silences surrounding AIDS on a personal level, like my father's resistance in asking me about HIV, and my inability to break that silence; or the strategic silences surrounding AIDS on a cultural level, like the popular configurations of *dis*-ease in spaces like the "tainted blood scandal" and films like *Philadelphia* and *Forrest Gump*, which, I argued, strategically displace "other" investments and concerns in need of address in this epidemic--these signifying practices and the critiques I broached were enabled in no small part because I chose to ignore the question of pain (what of the fact that *Philadelphia* made me cry?). Similarly, those unconscious semantic interventions surrounding AIDS on a personal level, like the slippage between AIDS and/as homosexuality exemplified by my traveling companion's comments; or the unconscious semantic interventions surrounding AIDS on a cultural level, those mechanisms that (perhaps unwittingly) facilitate the recuperation of dominant value systems--these were analyzed within the framework of discursive formation, without recourse to a consideration of bodies in pain that might also in part facilitate these utterances.

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[211] Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* 12.

How we as subjects negotiate the reality (*sans* quotation marks) of AIDS in our day-to-day sexual lives can only be accounted for *in part* by political and cultural theory. There is so much more that escapes the text. It remains up to each of us as individual subjects both within discourse and in the world to confront the acid terrors AIDS has offered us as sexual beings in the economy of exchange. Discourse could never fully or adequately accomplish that task.

To paraphrase Roland Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*: the crisis that is AIDS is indeed a wound, but it can also be a fusion: "we die together from loving each other."

All discourse that remains discourse ends in boring man

--Alexander Kojeve

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