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Retro/viral:

Temporality, Territory and Biopolitics in Post-AIDS Cinema

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Abstract

The widespread implementation of highly-active antiretroviral therapy to treat HIV/AIDS in the late 1990s instigated a rapid shift in the lived experience of the condition. AIDS was no longer a ‘death sentence’ for many, yet two decades later it remains a ‘life sentence’ for some. This shift promulgated a temporal disjuncture in the screen mediation of HIV/AIDS. This thesis addresses the fictionalised portrayal of HIV/AIDS in the ‘post-crisis’ era – that is, the era following the ‘end’ of the ‘AIDS crisis’ – and argues that the ‘AIDS epidemic’ paradigm has transitioned to an ‘HIV endemic’ paradigm. Borrowing from the terms of epidemiology, the conceptualisation of the AIDS crisis era as ‘epidemic’ infers that the cultural mediation of the virus, in addition to the virus itself, are imagined as exponentially increasing across population groups. In contrast, the conceptualisation of the ‘post-crisis’ era as ‘endemic’ infers that the prevalence of the virus, in addition to its cultural mediation, is understood as ‘stable’ and ‘normal’ for a particular place or population. This thesis posits that the shift from epidemic to endemic logics is manifest in screen fiction along threads of temporality, territory, and biopolitics. Examining contemporary HIV/AIDS screen fiction in three diverse sites – namely, the AIDS nostalgia film, entertainment-education media, and bareback pornography – this thesis presents a crucial, critical analysis of the mediation of the virus and the disease in this disjunctured moment. It illustrates the ways in which narratives and metaphors of the virus permeate cultural production, and accounts for the contemporary conflicted meanings of HIV/AIDS in the US, Canadian, Chinese, Kenyan, Nigerian and South African contexts. Through critical interventions which transgress both geopolitical and generic boundaries, this thesis argues that the temporal, spatial and biopolitical manifestations of HIV/AIDS in contemporary screen fiction reveal a conceptual dislocation between broad cultural understandings of the condition and the lived experience of the condition in the ‘post-crisis’ era.

Declaration

- i. This thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD.
- ii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.
- iii. This thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.



Joshua Pocius

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Glossary of Abbreviations and Foreign Terms

Abbreviations

AHF	AIDS Healthcare Foundation
AIDS	Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome
ART	Antiretroviral Therapy
ARV	Antiretroviral
AZT	Azidothymidine
CDC	(United States) Centers for Disease Control
DV	Digital Video
EE	Entertainment-Education
FDA	(United States) Food and Drug Administration
HAART	Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy
HBO	Home Box Office
HFG	HIV-Free Generation
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDU	Intravenous Drug User
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IV	Intravenous
KS	Kaposi's sarcoma
MDMA	3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (ecstasy)
MTCT	Mother-to-child Transmission
MSM	Men who have Sex with Men
NACA	(Nigerian) National Agency for the Control of AIDS
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PCP	<i>Pneumocystis pneumonia</i>

PLHIV	Person/s Living with HIV
PEP	Post-Exposure Prophylaxis
PEPFAR	(United States') President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PRC	People's Republic of China
PrEP	Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis
PWA	Person/s with AIDS
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
TasP	Treatment-as-Prevention
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS
VHS	Video Home System
WHO	World Health Organisation

Notes on Foreign Terms

Where Standard Mandarin terms appear throughout this thesis, they will be romanised using Hànyǔ Pīnyīn and italicised, with the simplified Chinese characters and English translation following in ellipses. For example, *yuánshǐ* (原始, origin/primitive).

Chinese names will be romanised in Hànyǔ Pīnyīn with the surname preceding the given name unless an Anglicised name is in common usage. For example, Zhāng Zǐyí and Aaron Kwok.

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Introduction

Backgrounding

When Susan Sontag wrote *Illness as Metaphor* in 1978, she asserted that “as long as a particular disease is treated as an evil, invincible predator, not just a disease, most people with cancer will indeed be demoralised by learning what disease they have.”¹ Sontag’s alternative, which she advocates in the following chapters, is not to “stop telling cancer patients the truth, but to rectify the conception of the disease, to de-mythicise it.”² Drawing on a cultural corpus of illness as metaphor ranging from antiquity to contemporary government policy, Sontag demonstrates how cancer and tuberculosis, among other diseases, have always been configured as diseases of signification, articulated and interpreted through metaphor. Writing in 1978, as her doctors were pessimistic about her likelihood of surviving cancer, it was the narratology of illness that most affected Sontag, and her disavowal of the cultural habit of using illness as metaphor and metaphor for illness appeared to have indeed liberated her from the signifiatory confines of being a “cancer victim”. Just three years after *Illness as Metaphor* was published, the United States Centers for Disease Control issued a report of a cluster of cases of *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia (PCP) and cytomegalovirus (CMV) in five homosexual men in Los Angeles, noting that:

¹Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, London, Penguin, 1991, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*

[PCP] in the United States is almost exclusively limited to severely immunosuppressed patients. The occurrence of [PCP] in these 5 previously healthy individuals without a clinically apparent underlying immunodeficiency is unusual. The fact that these patients were all homosexuals suggests an association between some aspect of a homosexual lifestyle or disease acquired through sexual contact and [PCP] in this population.³

With this report, the signification of what is now known as HIV and/or AIDS was born, and the meanings and metaphors associated with this new illness – in addition to the meanings and metaphors associated with male homosexuality – were inscribed. In 1989, eight years after the cultural genesis of what was now known as “the AIDS crisis”, Sontag revisited *Illness as Metaphor*, and in her updated response, she wrote:

In the decade since I wrote *Illness as Metaphor* – and was cured of my own cancer, confounding my doctors’ pessimism – attitudes about cancer have evolved ... and not least among the reasons that cancer is now treated less phobically, certainly with less secrecy, than a decade ago is that it is no longer the most feared disease. In recent years some of the onus of cancer has been lifted by the emergence of a disease whose charge of stigmatisation, whose capacity to create spoiled identity, is far greater. It seems that societies need to have one illness which becomes identified with evil, and attaches blame to its ‘victims’, but it is hard to be obsessed with more than one.⁴

By the mid-1980s, the impact of the AIDS crisis had reached epidemic proportions within specific urban centres, and through the 1980s both people living with HIV (PLHIV) and the biomedical and epidemiological constructions of HIV and AIDS began to be depicted in literature, visual arts, music, and screen-mediated fiction. For Sontag, the cultural narratology through which disease is interpellated and disseminated – the metaphors that euphemise and obfuscate the conditions of living with disease, as well as the ways in which diseases are culturally (re)articulated – are intrinsic to the epistemology and phenomenology of that disease. An aspect that Sontag does not engage with directly, although it is certainly tethered to the narratology of disease – biomedically, epidemiologically, and culturally – is the way in which this discourse is shaped by and expressed through shifting temporalities and anxieties about the fluidity and vulnerability of borders.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ‘Epidemiological Notes and Reports: *Pneumocystis Pneumonia* --- Los Angeles’, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 30, no. 21 (June 1981), 1-3.

⁴ Sontag, pp. 100-1.

Temporality is incorporated as an analytic by Sontag only insofar as accounting for the distinction between AIDS and cancer. The latter is a disease that is governed by spatial discourse which “advances through the body, travelling or migrating along predictable routes ... a disease of the body’s geography.”⁵ The former, in contrast, is governed by time, characterised by Sontag as a “slow disease.”⁶ Inasmuch as time is the dominant phenomenological framework through which HIV and AIDS is discursively constructed across scientific, medical, virological, political and economic dimensions, it similarly holds a key position within HIV/AIDS cultural production. The dominance of temporality in the cultural response towards HIV and AIDS is no more apparent than in the title, distribution, and narrative structure of the first American feature film to depict HIV/AIDS, John Erman’s 1985 made-for-TV movie *An Early Frost*. The film epitomises the template narrative and temporal structure of the first wave of Anglophone AIDS movies: an ‘otherwise healthy’ white upper-middle-class gay man contracts HIV through his partner’s sexual indiscretion, he endures an existential crisis that is represented as being more a crisis for the heterosexual people in his life than for himself, coming out as gay and then also coming out as HIV-positive, which is then followed by a noble death (in this case, of a flamboyant fellow patient in his hospital room). As HIV/AIDS – and PLHIV – are discursively constructed around notions of temporality in this film, the foundations are laid for this type of representation to replicate throughout the 1980s and early 1990s in a plethora of films that deal with the topic, many of which illustrate the divisive and violent discourses that constitute what Paula Treichler termed an “epidemic of signification.”⁷ From the early 1990s, charged with the energy of emerging AIDS activist groups, a range of independent filmmakers produced films engaging with politics of resistance, such as John Greyson’s 1993 musical *Zero Patience*, an attempt to address and problematise the biomedical and epidemiological construction of the Canadian airline attendant Gaetan Dugas as ‘patient zero’ of the virus in the Western hemisphere, and Gregg Araki’s 1992 PLHIV road movie *The Living End*. The most commercially successful and widely distributed HIV/AIDS films, however, each offers a narrative that elucidates distance. In the case of Jonathan Demme’s 1993 film *Philadelphia*, the distance between the lived temporality

⁵ Ibid., p.108.

⁶ Ibid., p.107.

⁷ Paula A Treichler, 'Aids, Homophobia and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1987.

of the imagined gay man living with AIDS and the temporality of the ideal white, heterosexual, middle-class subject undergoes an attempt of minimisation, as Demme draws on the figure of the child as an appeal to futurity. Conversely, Jean-Marc Valeé's 2013 film *Dallas Buyers Club* forges distance between the theme of HIV/AIDS and the present day, working to both historicise HIV/AIDS and PLHIV as an event that occurred in the 1980s (with the implication that HIV/AIDS “doesn't happen now”, or, at least, “doesn't happen here anymore”) and to reimagine the broader cultural history of early PLHIV activism in the United States from the perspective of a ‘straight’ man.⁸

Foregrounding

Three years after *Philadelphia* was released, Andrew Sullivan opined in *The New York Times*, declaring “the end of AIDS.”⁹ Combination antiretroviral and protease inhibitor treatment had proved successful in reducing the levels of HIV in the bloodstream to the point of being “undetectable” and thus the “crisis” phase of AIDS waned. Eric Rofes referred to this shift as the “Protease Moment,” signalling the technological basis of this intervention.¹⁰ For those with access to health services, the opportunistic infections and AIDS-defining illnesses subsided, people stopped dying, and suddenly the potential futurity of PLHIV was expanded. The advent of successful antiretroviral therapy not only induced radical changes to the temporality of people living with HIV in countries where treatment was affordable and accessible but also exacerbated existing spatial delineations of the epidemic. In this sense, the distance between PLHIV in high-income countries with widespread antiretroviral access and PLHIV in low- and middle-income countries or countries with limited access to antiretrovirals increased. HIV was not cured in 1996, but the cultural, biomedical and

⁸ Whilst the character of Ron Woodruff (portrayed by Matthew McConaughey) is presented in *Dallas Buyers Club* as a homophobic heterosexual man, Ron Woodruff was neither homophobic nor heterosexual, according to those who knew him (Arnold Wayne Jones, 'King of Clubs', *Dallas Voice*, 8 November 2013, <http://www.dallasvoice.com/king-clubs-10161057.html>.); he worked at a gay centre in Dallas, and had relationships with gay men (Ryan Buxton, 'The Real Ron Woodruff 'Had Relationships With Gay Men,' Says A Friend Of The 'Dallas Buyers Club' Subject', *Huffington Post*, 2 July 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/entry/ron-woodruff-gay-dallas-buyers-club_n_4740155.).

⁹ Andrew Sullivan, 'When Plagues End', *The New York Times Magazine*, 10 November 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/11/10/magazine/when-plagues-end.html>.

¹⁰ Eric E Rofes, *Dry Bones Breathe: Gay Men Creating Post-AIDS Identities and Cultures*, Philadelphia, Haworth Press, 1998.

epidemiological meanings of HIV and AIDS experienced a rapid temporal and spatial shift.

On the horizon, in 1996, HIV/AIDS could be seen as being a chronic condition in high income countries, manageable with treatment, and no longer a definitive “death sentence;” treating HIV early with antiretrovirals, reducing the viral load in PLHIV significantly reduces the likelihood of transmission to others, and thus, a foreseeable shift from an epidemic situation towards a situation in which HIV is endemic in certain population groups. With divergent levels of access to treatment depending initially on a person’s citizenship or, following that, on their personal economic status, geopolitical borders and global economic inequality increase the distance between the temporal experience of seropositive people around the world. For those with access to treatment, HIV is no longer necessarily a ‘death sentence’, however it is indeed a ‘life sentence’, as seropositive people are engaged as lifelong consumers to pharmaceutical companies who have a vested commercial interest in promoting treatment rather than cure. These epidemiological developments ushered in the ‘post-crisis’ era. Recent pharmaceutical expansion into the realm of prevention raises further possibilities of ‘at-risk’ groups joining PLHIV as lifelong consumers of antiretroviral drugs. However, despite many advances in medicine and science, nearly 20 years after this shift, HIV remains incurable and rates of infection are increasing across many divergent populations. The shifting culturally-specific meanings of HIV further engender spatialised differences in both the epidemiology of the virus and its impact on populations. Broader adoption of highly-active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) in the Global South¹¹ has seen a decline in the rate of new infections, whilst younger generations of men who have sex with men

¹¹ I use the terms ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ throughout this thesis as a shorthand way of denoting that unequal development across national borders broadly aligns with a distinction between concentrated economic and political power in the northern regions of Europe and North America and economic and political subordination in the southern regions of South America, Asia, Africa and the Pacific. As Sylvia Chant and Cathy McIlwaine argue, the prefix of ‘Global’ “clarifies that this is not a geographical categorisation of the world” but rather “one based on economic inequalities albeit with some spatial resonance in terms of where the countries concerned are situated.” (in *Geographies of Development in the 21st Century: An Introduction to the Global South*, Cheltenham, UK, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2009, p.11). There are many examples which contradict this oversimplification of global difference. The settler-colonial nations of Australia and New Zealand, both being highly developed, wealthy, and with a dominant European culture, are geographically situated in the South but would be considered to belong to the Global North. Conversely, Mongolia and Kazakhstan are both geographically further north than some European nations yet developmentally can be understood as being members of the Global South. In this thesis, the term is used in relation to global HIV/AIDS, which, as I demonstrate in Chapter Three, has been imagined around the notion of “patterns” of AIDS which largely correspond to the World Health Organisation’s regional delineations, which in themselves are products of European colonisation and uneven development.

(MSM) in the earlier epicentre of the 1980s AIDS crisis – large cities such as New York, San Francisco, Sydney and London – are witnessing an increase in the infection rate after nearly two decades in the ‘post-crisis’ era. Whilst greater numbers of people are now living with HIV/AIDS, the screen-mediated narrative fiction representation of people with HIV/AIDS has diminished to a level of near invisibility. In much the same way as HAART has been successful in reducing viral load to an invisible, ‘undetectable’ level, HIV/AIDS remains ever present yet remarkably absent from cultural representation. Even within the context of queer film, which has been, for better or for worse, betrothed to the spectre of HIV/AIDS since the earliest days of cultural discourse on the virus, representations of people living with HIV/AIDS have diminished from the offerings at queer film festivals. Simultaneously, a recent proliferation of documentary films addressing the AIDS crisis years in the United States serves to further historicise HIV as something “from another time”, rendering PLHIV as anachronistic, or conversely, as something “from another place” through depictions of HIV/AIDS in the Global South.

In this thesis, I posit that the “Protease Moment”¹² instigated a temporal disjuncture for those living with or in proximity to HIV and AIDS. However, the rapid changes and shifts in the lived experiences of HIV pushed forth by the increasing implementation of highly-active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) from the late 1990s onwards similarly induced a crisis of representation. Bereft of adequate means to mediate these narratives through screen culture, HIV/AIDS cinema in the ‘post-crisis’ era is refracted through a temporal paradigm that I refer to as ‘endemic’. In the endemic era, in which HIV is ever-present yet culturally invisible, the temporality of HIV/AIDS is circumscribed as anachronistic, post-apocalyptic, and nostalgic. Endemic temporality understands HIV through the indexical sign of AIDS, envisioning the virus as something that happened in the past. The endemic era produces a spatial regime in which HIV/AIDS is articulated through processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialization, and constitutes a spatial embodiment of epidemiological thinking. Spatially, HIV/AIDS is imagined as something that happens ‘elsewhere’ yet paradoxically remains a non-localised threat. Endemic biopower is enacted through immunitarian, neoliberal paradigms and a chemoprophylactic affective rubric that I

¹² Rofes.

suggest can be understood as an ‘erotics’ of HIV. Endemic biopower marks a shift in the biopolitical management of the virus, away from the thanatopolitical regimes which manage the death of its hosts to the biopolitical regimes which seek to profit from its ongoing treatment.

This thesis attempts to reconceptualise the cultural articulation of HIV/AIDS onscreen in the ‘post-AIDS’ era. It marks a remapping of the temporal, territorial and biopolitical trajectories of HIV representation in the contemporary moment, at a time in which pharmaceutical interventions have rapidly reshaped the terrain of HIV/AIDS and a time in which the consensus of neoliberal globalisation is being questioned on both sides of politics. In these anxious, precarious and volatile times, it is crucial to assess the ways in which cultural narratives of the virus are imagined, formulated and circulated. I argue that the endemic, ‘post-crisis’ phase of global HIV/AIDS is illuminated on screens both large and small through the prism of endemicity, whereby the temporal, spatial and biopolitical logics which underpin the cultural articulation of HIV/AIDS have been recast from an epidemic to an endemic paradigm. This thesis demonstrates these new temporal, spatial and biopolitical logics of contemporary HIV/AIDS screen culture through critical analyses of fictional screen mediations across generic and geopolitical borders. In order to demonstrate my postulation, this thesis addresses a broad scope of contemporary screen fiction about HIV/AIDS.

Commensurate with the underlying representational crisis which this thesis seeks to interrogate, contemporary screen fiction addressing HIV/AIDS in any meaningful way are few and far between. The typical ‘AIDS film’ genre has hybridised into engagements with HIV/AIDS in diverse and specific zones; as such, there are three key sites of inquiry in this thesis, and these are organised into separate chapters. Although each chapter concerns a very different manifestation of HIV/AIDS onscreen and different manifestations of HIV/AIDS in geopolitically-bounded contexts – including Canada, the People’s Republic of China, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa and the United States – they are all underpinned by a conceptual framework which is able to be taken as a guiding rubric through which ‘post-crisis’ HIV/AIDS screen fiction operate.

In Chapter 1 I outline this conceptual framework, articulating the ways in which temporality, territory and biopolitics can be conceived of through the AIDS epidemic era and the ‘post-AIDS’ HIV endemic era. I account for the extant literature addressing

temporality in the AIDS crisis, the geopolitics of HIV prevention and treatment, and the biopolitics of neoliberal healthcare regimes and pharmacopower. Similarly, I review extant literature addressing the filmic articulation of HIV/AIDS in the AIDS crisis era to establish a furtive background of AIDS screen fiction alongside which the relative paucity of screen-mediated HIV fiction in the endemic era is striking. I illustrate that the extant literature accounting for the filmic representation of HIV/AIDS is firmly grounded in an epidemic modality, with a dearth of scholarly contemplation addressing the impact of the temporal disjuncture of antiretroviral therapy. Similarly, the extant literature on HIV/AIDS filmic representation is squarely grounded in a Euro-American context. In this sense, the broader cultural assumption is that HIV/AIDS is mediated through screen culture in the Global North and conversely unmediated in the Global South, where the epidemic is imagined as totalising and ongoing. I argue that the shifting locus of the virus across the three conceptual sub-domains of temporality, territory and biopolitics demands a new critical appliance equipped with the capability to account for the shift from an epidemic to an endemic paradigm.

In Chapter 2 I address the emergent corpus of films produced in the 2010s which deploy a nostalgic frame to memorialise and reimagine the years of the AIDS crisis. Mobilising the late Svetlana Boym's delineation of two related yet divergent modalities of nostalgia – reflective and restorative – I address films which can be read as restorative nostalgic articulations of the AIDS crisis in their respective contexts in Jean-Marc Vallee's *Dallas Buyers Club* and Gu Changwei's *Love for Life*. I then move on to consider two films which encapsulate the reflective nostalgic mode in Ryan Murphy's *The Normal Heart* and Christopher Mason Johnson's *Test*. Through rigorous close analysis, I demonstrate how these films deploy an affective mode of nostalgic reception whilst mobilising a backwards gaze which places contemporary debates about healthcare provision and sexual citizenship onto historical images of the AIDS crisis.

In Chapter 3 I turn to supranationally-funded and produced HIV awareness media utilising screen fiction to advance health communication messaging. Considering Cindy Patton's critique of the delineation of the global AIDS crisis into geopolitically-coordinated 'patterns' of HIV as a useful conceptualisation, I demonstrate the ways in which the mediation, articulation and praxis of HIV/AIDS is wholly geocorpographic; that is, that the geopolitical inscription of the body radically determines the biopolitical

framework through which that body is conceived. Addressing both the “global event film” through Thom Fitzgerald’s *3 Needles* and the education-entertainment genre through MTV’s *Shuga* franchise, I demonstrate how HIV/AIDS is deterritorialised and reterritorialised in the ‘post-AIDS’ endemic era, and how different geopolitical zones are subject to different temporal modalities, regimes of spatial governance, and biopolitical paradigms.

Finally, in Chapter 4 my scope of inquiry shifts to gay male bareback pornography as a critical site in which the mediation of both the virus and its relationship to drugs collide, producing a fertile site for an emergent conceptual paradigm which I designate as an erotics of HIV through which forms of embodied desire, pleasure, danger and risk coalesce. I argue that the gay bareback pornography genre, as spearheaded by director Paul Morris and his Treasure Island Media studio, consists of a ‘slippery corpus’ where the delineation between ethnographic documentary and phantasmic cinema is diffuse, and it is this diffusion which engenders a filmic zone in which the contemporary embodied meanings of HIV and AIDS can be critically explored.

What emerges from these three disparate critical engagements is a picture of the ways in which this virus, omnipresent yet hidden and living on in over 36 million people worldwide, continues to speak through screen fiction thirty-five years on from its discovery. In the concluding chapter of *AIDS as Metaphor*, Sontag evinces hope that the forthcoming ‘apocalypse’ of AIDS that was envisioned at the peak of the crisis, the “dystopian harbinger of the global village,”¹³ would come to seem normal, that it would be treatable and would be considered “just an illness.” Through its normalisation, Sontag hoped, people living with HIV would be able to look forward to a future in which they would be liberated from its stigmatising cultural metaphors, if not from the virus itself. Through my analysis of the temporal, territorial and biopolitical metaphors circulating through contemporary screen fiction depicting HIV and AIDS, I hope that I am able to continue Sontag’s work in “exposing, criticising, belabouring and using up”¹⁴ these metaphors, to provide a theoretical conceptualisation of the ways in which illness, disease and medicine are mediated through culture and to assist in producing the

¹³ Sontag, p. 178.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.179.

critical distance between their meanings and the lived experience of HIV in the so-called 'post-AIDS' era.

Chapter One

Time, Space and Body from Epidemic to Endemic

Extant Literature

The impact of the AIDS crisis informed and encouraged a blooming of cultural production within queer communities as implicated artists driven by suddenly diminished lifespans and affected communities driven by the need for urgent action and awareness pushed to produce works. In the case of the implicated, the desire to produce in order to leave something behind resulted in a corpus of “last works”. In an interview in Rosa von Praunheim’s 1990 documentary *Silence = Death*, the writer, artist and AIDS activist David Wojnarowicz laments the “incredible pressure to leave something of myself behind.”¹ The immense rapidity and concentration with which the AIDS crisis struck urban gay male communities in cities such as New York came not only as a shock to the communities it ravaged, but also resulted in the unique relationship between a minority group ex-communicated from the hegemonic mainstream and a non-chrononormative awareness and threat of mortality. These unique circumstances produced an environment in which many young artists were present in the act of bearing

¹ Schweigen = Tod: Künstler in New York kämpfen gegen AIDS (Silence = Death: Artists in New York fight against AIDS), dir. Rosa von Praunheim, Germany, 1990, [DVD].

witness to their own personal and broader collective trauma as it was unfolding around them. The significant cultural output of this period, and the sense of urgency in producing cultural artefacts of memory, mirrors the political catch-cry of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) to which von Praunheim refers in the title of her documentary. However, as Jason Tougaw notes, for most of these artists, early death from AIDS was inevitable, and the process of breaking the silence only assisted in evading a death from the cultural consciousness.² The push to be remembered resulted in a genre of AIDS memoirs and informed many screen mediations of HIV/AIDS throughout and following the crisis years. Derek Jarman's 1993 swan song *Blue* is perhaps the exemplar of the cinematic AIDS memoir.³ The film presents the viewer with a static blue screen, performing "a radical visual ascesis by removing all images from the frame," elucidating an affective response as the voice is privileged and the viewer is limited to the reduced visuality that Jarman himself was experiencing as the cytomegalovirus, a common AIDS-defining illness, attacked his optical nerves rendering him blind.⁴

Coetaneous with the autobiographical AIDS memoirs, community-produced documentary videos, avant-garde literary, cinematic and theatrical works of the AIDS crisis years was the emergence of a new genre of narrative film, the 'AIDS movie'. Beginning with *An Early Frost*⁵ in 1985 - the first feature or televised film to deal with HIV/AIDS - a swathe of films were produced during the AIDS crisis and in the few years that followed the introduction of HAART which set the stage for the articulation of HIV/AIDS narratives in mainstream culture. In a comprehensive account of the genre, Kylo-Patrick Hart analyses 32 such films from *An Early Frost* through to Christopher Reeve's 1997 *In the Gloaming*, using a multidisciplinary approach that draws from the "empirical advantages of social-scientific content analysis" and the "flexibility of humanistic textual analysis and criticism".⁶ Hart's study is particularly

² Jason Tougaw, 'Testimony and the Subjects of AIDS Memoirs', in Nancy K Miller and Jason Tougaw (eds), *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2002, p. 168.

³ See *Filmography*.

⁴ Roger Hallas, *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2009, p. 217.

⁵ See *Filmography*.

⁶ Kylo-Patrick R Hart, *The AIDS Movie: Representing a Pandemic in Film and Television*, Binghamton, Haworth Press, 2000, p. 11.

useful in outlining the characteristics of AIDS films within the genre, in the sense that genres can be understood as both “fuzzy categories”⁷ and as “agents of ideological closure” that “limit the meaning-potential of a given text”.⁸ For Hart, the key characteristics of the AIDS genre film are a consideration of the “victim continuum”, whereby people with HIV are situated along a spectrum that “acknowledges differential degrees of innocence/guilt;”⁹ the construction (or elision) of notions of Otherness, with gay men constituting “the Primary Other”; and the use of coded spatial representation (such as the delineation between the dangers of the gay metropolis and the safety of small-town middle America). Hart’s sociological background proves useful in his account of victim-blaming, outlining what Cadwell says is a strategy to “make something that is incomprehensible somehow explainable, and thereby, seemingly controllable, as well as a means to locate the locus of risk outside of oneself and in ‘the other’.”¹⁰ The trope of the innocent victim and the deserving deviant is explored by Hart in relation to the films *A Place for Annie* (1994), *Boys on the Side* (1995), *Chocolate Babies* (1996), *Parting Glances* (1986), *Our Sons* (1991), *The Living End* (1992), *Something to Live For: The Alison Gertz Story* (1992), *Love! Valour! Compassion!* (1997), *Citizen Cohn* (1992), *The Immortals* (1995) and *The Ryan White Story* (1989).¹¹ Jonathan Demme’s 1993 film *Philadelphia*, broadly accepted as the most successful Hollywood feature AIDS film, exemplifies the victimhood continuum through the heteronormative narrativisation that contrasts the main character Andrew Beckett (portrayed by Tom Hanks in an Oscar-winning performance), a gay man dying from AIDS, with the positionality of his former colleague Mrs. Benedict, a heterosexual married woman - a mother - who contracted HIV through a blood transfusion that was required during childbirth. Unlike Beckett, whose victimhood in the narrative of the film is complicated and contested through his unfair dismissal case and his deserving status as a gay man, Mrs. Benedict evades dismissal “and, more significantly in terms of the heteronormative economy of this film, she is not dying from AIDS but living with

⁷ Daniel Chandler, *An Introduction to Genre Theory*, http://faculty.washington.edu/farkas/HCDE510-Fall2012/Chandler_genre_theoryDFAnn.pdf, 1997.

⁸ Hartley in Chandler, 1997, p. 6.

⁹ McKinney and Pepper in Hart, 2000, p. 39

¹⁰ Cadwell in Hart, 2000, p. 37.

¹¹ See *Filmography*.

it.”¹² In this sense, Beckett is Othered within the law firm he was fired from not for having AIDS but for being homosexual; conversely, as Gabriele Griffin articulates, “since she is ... a part of the heteronormative world which ... the film seeks to maintain, over-invested in that scenario as ‘wife-and-mother’, she poses no threat to the world and does not disturb the boundaries of sexual difference it constructs in the way that Beckett is perceived to do.”¹³ Thus, within the narrative space of *Philadelphia*, not only are the boundaries between heterosexual/homosexual, seropositive/seronegative and male/female enunciated, but also the dichotomic construction of indicators of innocence and guilt among PLHIV.

The notion of Otherness is illustrated in HIV/AIDS media not only through narrative Othering within the text, but through the very relationship between the media maker and the audience, as demonstrated by Alexandra Juhasz in *AIDS TV*. Juhasz stresses that not only is the relationship between the two important, but the position of the two is crucial - “a position of self-identified difference created in direct opposition to a mainstream practice which insistently and consistently constructs images by and for protected outsiders, who are immune from HIV and who are distanced from the people infected by it.”¹⁴ Drawing on a distinction argued by Timothy Landers, Juhasz continues that the alternative AIDS media can be understood as a media created for and by the Other, “the Anti-Body”, those in opposition to what is understood as “The Body - white, middle-class, and heterosexual.”¹⁵ In this sense, Juhasz is arguing that the processes of Othering should not be conceptualised as merely a repression of PLHIV, a repression of the seropositive body, but also as a potential mode of engagement that can be reclaimed by the very body that is being repressed, a self-identified Othering in order to reconstitute the narratives, bodies and voices of PLHIV outside of the confines of an apathetic mainstream culture.

Roger Hallas takes up the notion of the temporal in relation to the AIDS film in a more direct manner, arguing that the use of song in AIDS media embodies a

¹² Gabriele Griffin, *Representations of HIV and AIDS: Visibility Blue/s*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 185.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Alexandra Juhasz, *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1995, p. 8.

¹⁵ Ibid.

testimonial potential, “realised not through the Romantic conception of vocal music as a transcendental experience but through its historical specificities and the contrapuntal dynamics they produce.”¹⁶ Analysing the work of Canadian queer filmmaker John Greyson – in particular, his 1993 film *Zero Patience* and his 2003 video opera installation *Fig Trees* – Hallas contends that song, as a “permeable space” is uniquely well-situated to bearing witness, producing a sense of corporeal mimesis and disrupting the narrative flow of a film, “creating a discursively differentiated space.”¹⁷ Both of Greyson’s films are remarkable for their explicit engagement with a radical project of queer temporality, violently destabilising the temporal structures of these historical moments and releasing their protagonists from the clutches of a mainstream archive of disembodiment through the corporeal power of the voice in its affectational potentiality in song. In *Zero Patience*, Greyson conducts a radical retelling of the story of Gaetan Dugas, the Quebecois flight attendant made infamous in Randy Shilts’ 1987 book *And The Band Played On: Politics, People and the AIDS Epidemic* as the first person to introduce HIV into North America.¹⁸ Utilising the formal techniques of the Hollywood musical, *Zero Patience* “pulls Zero from the shadow archive of AIDS representation in the form of a ghost – a figure haunting the cultural imagination, but also an ordinary gay life in the end unseen and unrecognised by public culture, and thus a loss still waiting to be mourned.”¹⁹ Thus, the central premise of the film is bearing witness to the life and death of Gaetan Dugas in order to redeem his representative memory.

Hallas argues that the use of the Hollywood musical format, often derided as a novelty or nostalgic American entertainment form, enables a deep embodied engagement with political and philosophical inquiries at the heart of the film – questions of queer narratology, queer temporality, queer monstrosity, immediacy, the archive, cultural memory, museology and embodied presence – and in doing so, is a “redemptive project”. Greyson utilises a camp sensibility throughout the film, however, as Hallas attests, this “ironic performativity” actually produces a stronger embodied empathy. Discussing one particular musical number where Zero and Dr. Richard Burton are

¹⁶ Hallas, p. 152.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.157-8.

¹⁸ As noted previously – and as explored as the central theme of the film – this claim is wildly inaccurate.

¹⁹ Hallas, p. 160.

viewing a sample of Zero's blood through a microscope, the results of which are represented as the character Miss HIV – portrayed by longtime PLHIV activist and singer Michael Callan in drag – floating on an inner tube in a pool of balloons-as-blood-cells, Hallas notes that “the testimonial aspect of the song momentarily ruptures the diegetic world of the film, for the song's voice is clearly that of a PWA rather than that of a drag queen retrovirus ... this number plays on the prevalent cultural slippage between the virus/syndrome and the person with the virus/syndrome.”²⁰ Hallas then moves to discuss Greyson's opera-installation, *Fig Trees*, in which Greyson problematizes the generic form and tropes of the opera. Installed in the Oakville Galleries in Oakville, Ontario from November 2003 to January 2004, *Fig Trees* comprised of eight “scenes”, installed in different rooms, and allowing visitors to choose their own path through the narrative. *Fig Trees* tells the story of Zackie Achmat, the South African AIDS activist and leader of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), who publically pledged to stop taking antiretroviral medications until they were made available through the public health system in South Africa. Both *Fig Trees* and *Zero Patience*, argues Hallas

rely heavily on queer anachronism to sustain the witnessing dynamics in their use of vocal genres. Greyson's queer anachronism involves not only the incorporation of anachronistic queers ... but also, and more important, the use of anachronism and its camp incongruity as a means to queer the space in which witnessing HIV/AIDS may occur.²¹

By combining anachronicity with the affective authenticity enabled by the embodied vocal presence of song, both of Greyson's films interrupt “any transcendental or universalising dynamic” and powerfully historicise the notion of bearing witness.²² The conceptualisation of anachronicity in relation to queers and Others is central to the project of this thesis, given the anachronism and impossibility of representation of PLHIV in a “post-AIDS era”, drawing on the work of Valerie Rohy's theory of anachronism as a tool for representational oppression of the Other.²³

²⁰ Ibid., p.167.

²¹ Ibid., pp.182-3.

²² Ibid., p.183.

²³ Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2009.

The relationship between HIV/AIDS and Otherness can also be conceptualised as occurring at the individual biological level. Recalling the work of Roberto Esposito in *Immunitas*, Jaakko Ailio argues that “AIDS ravages the subjectivity of an individual as ‘the disease destroys the very idea of an identity-making border: the difference between self and other, internal and external, inside and outside.’”²⁴ For Ailio, Esposito’s claims on the abject potential of disease in a subject are especially pertinent in the case of HIV/AIDS, as “an immune system’s CD4 T cells, in which the HIV virus resides, have under normal conditions the task of activating and directing the immune defences, but in the case of the HIV virus the activation of these cells paradoxically makes them more hospitable to the virus and actually helps the virus to replicate.”²⁵ In this sense, the HIV virus subverts the very biological mechanisms that the body uses to ward off external invasions, turning the body’s own border agents against itself. This conceptualisation of HIV as a subversion of the body’s border defences – and thus an attack of an individual’s subjectivity and divide between self and other – is also apparent in the case of some cancers, such as leukaemia, in which the overproduction of leukocytes (“white blood cells”), which are a key function of the body’s immunological defence system, cause an inability for the body to defend itself from further outside infections. In this sense, the sense of Otherness that is invoked in relation to HIV/AIDS and to the construction of PLHIV onscreen mirrors the internal biological Otherness occurring within a subject, and highlights the ways that the borders of the self and Other are also issues of spatiality: as Esposito notes, distinctions between “internal and external, inside and outside.”²⁶

The AIDS film is also characterised by Hart in terms of the spatial dissonance between the modalities of the urban and the rural. The metropolis is simultaneously imagined as both gay utopia and AIDS dystopia; Hart notes that 84% of the films in his study demonstrate a narratological urbanism, with the notion of “the City” as a key component of the narrative.²⁷ Urban spaces are constructed in the films analysed as spaces in which a distinctive gay culture is present and a supportive subculture exists

²⁴ Jaakko Ailio, 'Liberal Thanatopolitics and the HIV/AIDS Pandemic', *Alternatives*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2013, p. 263.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 262.

²⁷ Hart, p. 67.

for gay men and lesbians, representing a sense of safety and community in opposition to the ostracisation and Othering in the smaller towns and rural settings that characters have moved from. In this sense the City often represents a character in itself. In the films analysed, the supportive and permissive culture of the City represents a “gay utopia”, however Hart notes that the “social paradox of successful gay liberation” in big American cities such as New York City, Los Angeles and San Francisco, with the accompanying “sex institutions” that served the newly liberated sexual desires and freedoms of a “polygamous gay sex” culture were ultimately the cause for the “rapid spread of HIV/AIDS through the gay population and eventually to members of various other social groups” in the City.²⁸ In this sense, the City functions as both gay utopia and AIDS dystopia, further signalling the sense that HIV/AIDS is the inevitable and deserved outcome of the excesses of sexual freedom in the 1970s and early 1980s in “gay ghettos” of the major cities. The construction of the notion that the City is the both the place where gay men can be safe and the place in which HIV/AIDS “happens” sits in contrast to the construction of the countryside as invoking the heartland of mainstream, heterosexual, “immune” America. Similarly, Hart notes that rural settings in AIDS films are often presented as a balm to the difficulties and danger of the City, a place where gay men can escape the realities of their urban, AIDS-tarnished communities.²⁹ However, “deviant city dwellers ... are never truly welcome in the country, where they pose a threat to its more moral social order.”³⁰ This spatial delineation, Hart notes, “dangerously reinforces outdated culturally shared notions of HIV/AIDS as a plague of the city and a threatening phenomenon of concern almost exclusively to residents there.”³¹ The relevance of such a spatial delineation is also highly specific to a particular time and cultural context, as although the concepts of spatiality, borders and containment are pertinent to all cultural constructions of HIV/AIDS, the relationship between space and HIV does not follow the “gay utopia / AIDS dystopia” dichotomy in all contexts. The history of HIV in China provides a germane example of both the relevance of spatiality and the divergent ways in which spatiality produces, contains and solidifies an epidemic. When the importation of foreign blood products was banned in China following the discovery of HIV, the

²⁸ Ibid., p. 73.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 80.

³¹ Ibid.

combination of marketization, geographically incommensurate development policies and deregulation resulted in tens of thousands of impoverished peasants infected with HIV through the course of selling their blood to private blood banks.³² In some areas, particularly in Hénán province, entire villages were involved in the “plasma economy”, resulting in “AIDS villages” in rural areas long before the increasing use of intravenous drugs and gargantuan levels of internal migration from underdeveloped provinces exacerbated the HIV infection rate in China’s major urban centres. As Johanna Hood notes, notions of spatiality and Otherness are emphasised in both the government response to the impending crisis and to popular knowledge of HIV in China. For Hood, China’s HIV/AIDS narrative is one of distancing, as HIV was represented in initial media campaigns as an affliction clearly located elsewhere and affecting Others, producing a sense of “imagined immunity” for the urban Han Chinese middle-class to whom the media was targeted.³³

The socio-political ramifications of spatiality in relation to HIV/AIDS are of obvious concern. The availability of combination antiretroviral treatment to those with either the personal wealth to afford them or the privilege of living in a country wealthy enough to provide state-funded healthcare to seropositive people results in a contemporary conceptualisation of HIV and AIDS either as a condition of another time (i.e., the a historicisation and temporal dislocation of HIV/AIDS) or a condition of another place (i.e., the notion that HIV/AIDS is spatially separated from the industrialised world and segregated to low-income nations). Further, the attempts at restricting the mobility of PLHIV in a globalised world highlight the ways in which spatiality intersects with HIV/AIDS; as Cindy Patton notes in *Globalizing AIDS*:

Global proximity no longer promised wondrous cultural explorations; rather, it seemed to facilitate the spread of exotic new diseases that were not only deadly to individual bodies but also threatening to the body politic: to its humanitarian ideals, its emerging global economy, and even, according to right-wing pundits, its ability to reproduce biologically. The practical realities of bodily contact, realities that had evaporated in the mediated embrace of global brotherhood, now seemed closer than close, realer than real – corporeal. There were three levels of response to the challenge the tiny virus posed

³² Jing Shao, 'Fluid Labor and Blood Money: The Economy of HIV/AIDS in Rural Central China', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2006.

³³ Johanna Hood, 'Distancing Disease in the Un-Black Han Chinese Politic: Othering Difference in China’s HIV/AIDS Media', *Modern China*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2013, p. 282.

to our sense of place and our sense of safety: national, international or supranational, and local.³⁴

Processes of globalisation may have facilitated the spread of the virus, however they also overwhelmingly determine the lines of demarcation between those who will experience HIV as a manageable condition and those who are likely to die from AIDS related illnesses. Anxieties over the containment of the virus – within individual bodies as well as within zones of “bare life” – represented the expression of concerns of HIV and spatiality from a global perspective as high-income countries were only just beginning to transition from epidemic to endemic temporality. Conversely, the spatiality of HIV is becoming less about containment of the virus and more about access to treatment, particularly with regards to the utilisation of treatment-as-prevention, as is the case with investment in mother-to-child-transmission (MTCT) prevention in areas of generalised epidemic (such as southern Sub-Saharan Africa) and the introduction of pre-exposure prophylaxis for seronegative people in high-income countries, particularly for those with an increased risk of infection, such as gay men in urban centres.

Hart’s genre study constitutes a useful analysis of the corpus of mainstream American AIDS films in the late twentieth century, identifying the key thematic structures and tropes of the genre. However, in defining what he sees as the genre, Hart is bound by the conceptual limitations inherent in his chosen approach. Such a broad overview of the field reduces the ability to interrogate the minutia of details present in the films, and thus Hart misses the many smaller ideological narratives at play in the AIDS film. Hart’s criticisms of the persistent representational link between HIV and gay men – whilst valid in terms of the problems inherent in the construction of cultural “risk groups” for a biological epidemic that does not discriminate in its choice of host once afforded the opportunity to establish itself – obfuscate the subcultural importance of the processes of mediated mourning and remembering for a community so heavily impacted by loss from AIDS.

A key response to this representational crisis came in the form of a number of characters of the American television programme *Queer as Folk*, the first major television serial centred on a group of gay and lesbian friends and their allies, which premiered in December 2000. Three major recurring cast members representing three

³⁴ Cindy Patton, *Globalizing AIDS*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. x.

very different generations of gay men were HIV-positive. The advent of serialised, recurring HIV-positive characters in the intimate framing of the television drama signalled the potential for a radical reimagining of the HIV-positive temporal lifespace, however the premiere season of *Queer as Folk* coincided with the end of Hart's study, thus an analysis or account of the programme's functioning as a site for the representation of living with as opposed to dying from HIV/AIDS in the gay community is not present in his book.

The extant literature addressing the screen-mediated fictional representation of HIV/AIDS produces an epistemology of HIV/AIDS cultural analysis that outline the key narrative, thematic and aesthetic elements of the genre along the axes of Otherness, embodied presence, spatiality, and representation. They provide a crucial account of the landscape of the AIDS crisis film and the visual regimes utilised in mediating HIV/AIDS narratives onscreen. They do not, however, account for the temporal disjuncture that the introduction of HAART unleashed on the implicated communities who could afford it, nor do they account for the fragmented and terse screen-mediated representations of HIV in the 'post-AIDS' era. In order to fully interrogate this temporal disjuncture and develop a cohesive account for the cinematic impossibility of screening HIV "after AIDS", a new conceptual framework is required that takes into account the temporal disjuncture of HIV/AIDS and the rapidly shifting biopolitical and geocorpographic terrain of contemporary HIV in a globalised world.

Intervention

It is the aim of this thesis to forge an understanding of the reasons why, in an era of rising HIV infection rates, a lackadaisical attitude by younger gay men towards HIV/AIDS, an increasing number of people across multiple population groups living with HIV, and emergent categories of implication and immunity afforded by advances in pharmaceuticals, there has been a cultural silence on the topic in screen-mediated narrative fiction. The sites of this study are televisual and cinematic fictional portrayals of HIV, AIDS, and PLHIV since 1996. The year 1996 is representative of a "turning point" in the narrative of HIV in the Global North that significantly shifted the phenomenological temporality of the virus and its human impact in a way that, for those with access to the resources necessary to obtain effective treatment, radically altered the

futurity of those living with HIV. It is at this juncture that a transition from AIDS-as-epidemic to HIV-as-endemic begins to occur, and the shift from epidemic time to endemic time is evident in the socio-political treatment of HIV and PLHIV in the Global North and also in cultural productions responding to HIV/AIDS. Understanding the meaning and impact of this transition, and the ways in which the different modalities of HIV/AIDS affect cultural representations of PLHIV, is demonstrative of the necessity for an analysis of the screen fiction response to HIV/AIDS and the cultural invisibility of HIV in the endemic era. The use of the epidemic/endemic dichotomy as a means to investigating the screen fiction representation of HIV/AIDS is useful in the ways in which it engenders an analysis that combines the theoretical concepts of queer temporality and the inextricable relationship between time and the moving image with a framework of biopolitics. Time is key to the delineation between an epidemic and an endemic in the epidemiological sense from which I borrow – with much artistic license – these terms as an analogy to the cultural rhythms of the epidemic AIDS crisis years and the endemic ‘post-AIDS’ era.

From a cultural studies perspective, theorising HIV as ‘endemic’ in the Global North not only serves to highlight the temporal and biopolitical distinctions between the years of the ‘AIDS crisis’ and the current existence of HIV, but also works to disavow the perception of a ‘post-AIDS’ era that HIV/AIDS are historical events rather than contemporary actualities. As David Román argues, “both the ‘end of AIDS’ and the post-AIDS discourse participate in a larger social phenomenon that encourages us to believe that the immediate concerns facing contemporary American culture, including queer culture, are not-about-AIDS.”³⁵ I deploy the term ‘post-AIDS’ throughout this thesis in quotations with the explicit understanding that the term “might best be understood not as [a marker] of a definitive and identifiable moment of closure but as the latest [development] in the discursive history of AIDS,”³⁶ and use it somewhat interchangeably with the term endemic time to designate the current cultural signification of HIV/AIDS in wealthy countries such as Australia and the United States; it must be noted, however, that the ramifications of global inequality render HIV/AIDS as geopolitically specific, and, as the WHO notes, AIDS remains an epidemic in much

³⁵ David Román, ‘Not-about-AIDS’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2000, p. 6.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

of the Global South. Whilst HIV is technically still considered a pandemic (i.e., an epidemic across multiple regions)³⁷ in the epidemiological sense, it is useful to consider how the socio-cultural and political responses to it mirror the epidemic/endemic distinction. Further, the drastic differences of experience with HIV for those with access to treatment compared to those without highlight the ways in which borders and spatiality overwhelmingly determine the temporality of HIV/AIDS.

Undertaking critical analysis of the corpus of screen-mediated cultural productions produced in the ‘post-crisis’ era, I posit that the radical temporal restructure that came as a result of widespread adoption of combination therapy treatments in the Global North initiated a change not only to the physiological properties of the human immunodeficiency virus and the lives of its hosts, but also resulted in a parallel shift in the discursive construction and representation of HIV/AIDS in culture. This temporal shift, however, created a disjuncture, or as Claire Laurier Decoteau summarises in recalling Derrida, a sense that the signified of HIV/AIDS is “out of joint” with its sociocultural signification.³⁸ For Decoteau, the cultural impact of the ‘post-AIDS’ era discursively constructs PLHIV as “spectral”, representing a “radical untimeliness” as their very existence as subjects living with a disease that the broader culture has relegated to the past leaves their presence in the present “haunting.”³⁹ It is this spectrality and temporal disjuncture, I contend, that is definitive of the cultural invisibility of HIV/AIDS and PLHIV in contemporary screen culture. In cultural contexts that can be said to be existing in a ‘post-AIDS’ era, PLHIV are inherently anachronistic, as their embodied presence runs counter to the cultural discourse that constructs HIV and AIDS as either temporally and/or spatially distant, a reality of other times or other places. In order to develop a deeper understanding of the etiology of this invisibility and identify the potential for representative futurity, I place the notion of temporality at the centre of my critical inquiry. Temporality, I argue, is the central narrative element by which “traditional” televisual and cinematic representations of HIV/AIDS and PLHIV are structured. In the ‘post-AIDS’ Global North, HIV is

³⁷ From an epidemiological perspective, the World Health Organisation understands HIV to be endemic in many areas, however remains an epidemic in others, depending on the level of containment and treatment (see Bonita *et al* 2006, p.121).

³⁸ Claire Laurier Decoteau, 'The Specter of AIDS: Testimonial Activism in the Aftermath of the Epidemic', *Sociological Theory*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2008, p. 232.

³⁹ Ibid.

represented in screen fiction as distant, either through the historicisation of HIV/AIDS in EuroAmerican cinema, or by virtue of the translocation of HIV/AIDS to the Global South (or “the ghetto”). In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Elizabeth Freeman contends that Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* “contributes to queer theory the idea that time can produce new social relations and even new forms of justice that counter the chrononormative and chronobiolitical.”⁴⁰ How, then, do we create a cultural representation of PLHIV that is post-spectral, that does not render the contemporary lived experience of HIV merely as “hauntological” reminders of an historical event but, rather, as embodied subjects living in the current space and time with a virus that remains to be completely contained or overcome? What are the implications for the representation and cultural mediation of a virus that has infected over 65 million people and resulted in the death of over 30 million when seropositive people are furtively distanced, either by a construction of distant times, or the fortification of conceptual, physical, legal and economic borders? What does the ghostly cultural invisibility of PLHIV in the last decade signify in relation to the ways in which we acknowledge the human experiences of survival and resistance? How do we talk about HIV when we can’t talk about HIV?

In this nascent chapter, I situate the present study in both temporal and thematic terms, locating the site, time and extant corpus in which I intend to intervene. Whilst cultural studies scholarship – and, in particular, queer studies scholarship – has witnessed numerous meditations on HIV and AIDS in film and television, ranging in theoretical approach from quantitative genre analysis of “AIDS films”,⁴¹ the intertextuality of cultural works dealing with AIDS and those dealing with apocalypticism in the era of nuclear anxiety,⁴² the use of melodrama in the AIDS film as a domesticating force that assigns the HIV-positive gay male with a reproductive femininity,⁴³ and focus group reception studies of portrayals of HIV in popular gay

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 9.

⁴¹ Hart.

⁴² Jacqueline Foertsch, *Enemies Within: The Cold War and the AIDS Crisis in Literature, Film, and Culture*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2001.

⁴³ Eva Cherniavsky, 'Real Again: Melodrama and the Subject of HIV/AIDS', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1998.

television programs,⁴⁴ I argue that insufficient attention has been placed on the cultural articulation of HIV and AIDS in what has become known as the ‘post-AIDS’ era. Further, there is a deficiency in work that extends theorisations about the social aspects of time to illuminate the ways in which global inequality materialises stark differences in the temporal experience of illness and the spatialised boundaries and delineations that fortify and uphold these differences. Critically analysing the extant literature on screen-mediated fictional representations in the ‘crisis’ and ‘post-crisis’ eras, I posit that the contemporary lack of cultural representation in the Global North can be identified as a temporal disjuncture brought on by the advent of highly active antiretroviral therapies (HAART) in the late 1990s. By centring the temporal in my inquiry, I am emphasising the ways in which illness is both constructed and experienced in temporal terms, and the ways that illness radically restructures one’s sense of futurity and memory of the past. Further, I am engaging with a theoretical discourse that has shifted from the seemingly limitless futurity offered in the post-Liberation, pre-AIDS years, as the virus, itself a ghost at that stage, was silently and discreetly taking root in this hospitable new environment. In recent years, scholars such as Lee Edelman,⁴⁵ J. Halberstam,⁴⁶ Elizabeth Freeman⁴⁷ and Nishant Shahani⁴⁸ have centred temporality in relation to queer phenomenology, attesting to the notion of “queer time”, that the temporality of queer existence can be understood as distinct from the heteronormative experience of time (chrononormativity) given the unique temporal experiences of the non-normative queer life. Historically, the limited ability for familial organisation and reproductiveness, for example, resulted in a queer futurity that stands outside of fecundity and prioritises the contemporaneous (and the embodied existence of the subject, as opposed to the sense of eternal futurity granted through reproduction). Gay liberation further adjusted queer temporality and in many ways queered the heterotemporal, as new forms of relationships and futures were explored. The impact of the AIDS crisis in queer

⁴⁴ Kathleen P Farrell, ‘HIV on TV: Conversations with Young Gay Men’, *Sexualities*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2006.

⁴⁵ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2004.

⁴⁶ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, New York and London, NYU Press, 2005.

⁴⁷ Freeman.

⁴⁸ Nishant Shahani, *Queer Retrosexualities: The Politics of Reparative Return*, Bethlehem, Lehigh University Press, 2012.

communities caused a rift in queer futurity and a dramatic change in the temporal experience of queer life. Finally, with the advent of HAART, the rift in queer temporality was replaced with a fissure of sudden futurity and a temporal realignment of the cultural meanings attached to the HIV-positive subject. However, differing national strategies in responding to HIV/AIDS, in addition to the prohibitive cost for providing treatment and investing in prevention, have resulted in a situation in which a global viral pandemic causes temporal shifts that are vastly different depending on spatiality.

The present study is interdisciplinary, and intervenes in three scholarly fields. Firstly, as an interrogation of the production, circulation and maintenance of cultural mythologies of HIV, AIDS and chronic illness, this thesis intervenes in the field of critical medical humanities. Atkinson *et al* argue that whilst the newly emergent field of medical humanities has produced significant work in the last decade to challenge dominant discourses of medicalisation, it “seldom if ever ventures beyond a neoliberal, humanist notion of the individual body-subject” and further, produces ample work addressing illness narratives and subjective experiences of illness “but with little critique of the wider political climate within which such work emerges.”⁴⁹ Interdisciplinarity is central to the utility of a field such as medical humanities and in particular to its critical turn. Drawing on the critical perspectives and methods of the humanities in order to intervene into biomedical culture, this thesis aims to “embrace entanglement”⁵⁰ in order to interrogate the cultural articulation of HIV/AIDS within the broader context of the cultural, economic and global politics of health.

Second, as a study of the screen mediation of HIV/AIDS which addresses the divergent ways in which the same referent is articulated through three distinct genres, this thesis intervenes in the field of screen studies. Whilst there have been numerous studies addressing the screen mediation of AIDS during the crisis, the key intervention into the field of screen studies presented here is application of a critical analytic framework across disparate screen genres. In particular, by affording pornographic screen texts with the same scholarly rigour as conventional screen texts, I aim to

⁴⁹ Sarah Atkinson et al., "'The Medical' and 'Health' in a Critical Medical Humanities", *Journal of Medical Humanities*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2015, p. 77.

⁵⁰ William Viney, Felicity Callard, and Angela Woods, 'Critical Medical Humanities: Embracing Entanglement, Taking Risks', *Medical Humanities*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2015.

illustrate the applicability of screen studies as a mode of critical inquiry into discourses of medicalisation, illness and health.

Finally, this thesis is situated within the field of cultural studies. Its overarching remit of undertaking a radical contextualisation of the cultural articulation of HIV/AIDS in the 'post-AIDS' era is indebted to the tradition of interdisciplinary, critical engagements with the ways in which meaning is manufactured, distributed and received through culture. Its critical challenges of dominant ideologies pertaining to illness, healthcare, sexuality, nostalgia, cultural memory and global inequality aim to reveal the ways in which these ideological formations permeate the broader cultural consciousness via the screen.

The following sections of this chapter outline the conceptual framework and methodology, introducing the key theoretical approaches that will underpin my intervention and the approach by which this study will elucidate and elaborate on the critical findings of my analysis. Finally, I outline the thesis structure and introduce the analytical chapters.

Conceptual Framework

In order to address the fractured articulation of screen-mediated HIV/AIDS narratives in the 'post-AIDS' era, I devise a conceptual framework that draws on an epidemiological epistemology to theorise how the cultural and political emanations of HIV/AIDS are modulated by a distinction between the spatio-temporality of an epidemic and the spatio-temporality of an endemic. By deploying and redirecting epidemiological terms to the study of cultural representation, I aim to reveal the interfacing processes of the medico-scientific and the cultural in order to highlight how biopower is mediated through temporal and spatial prisms and articulated in screen culture. Reading these cultural products through a prism that acknowledges the temporal, spatial and biopolitical differences between epidemic and endemic time, the temporal schism induced by the introduction of HAART and the subsequent impossibility of HIV/AIDS cultural representation is made visible. Further, the dialogue between the materiality of HIV/AIDS and its cultural representation - as mediated

through contemporary political, geocorpographic and economic paradigms - is revealed by an analysis that conceptualises the “AIDS epidemic” and “post-AIDS HIV endemic” periods as structured around divergent concerns and opposing temporal logics.

Of course, the use of the categories of epidemic and endemic as salient metaphors to encapsulate the temporal, spatial and biopolitical experience of HIV and AIDS does not perfectly correlate with the meanings of these terms in biomedical discourse. However, as Ed Cohen reminds us, in recounting the work of cosmologist Lee Smolin, “metaphor and theory exist symbiotically;”⁵¹ that is, that successful scientific theories bring forth cogent non-scientific metaphors which in turn perform work to shape the direction of scientific experimentation and research. Similarly, new scientific developments often borrow from established non-scientific metaphors as a way of describing phenomena. Isaac Newton’s theory of gravity, for example, draws on *gravitas*, “an ancient concept that encompasses the material, emotional and moral senses of weightiness, heaviness, and significance.”⁵² The metaphor of *gravitas* thus precedes the theoretical deployment of the term, structuring the discursive production of the theory. When scientific theory becomes so embedded in popular discourse, it transmutes further as new popular formations of metaphor are produced. Cohen’s genealogical project mapping the history of the concept of “immunity” from its origins as a juridico-political term in the Ancient world to its relatively recent appropriation as a way to describe biological self-defence by Élie Metchnikoff demonstrates how the salience of the term passes from the metaphorical to the scientific and then returns to popular metaphoric usage, albeit removed from its originary meaning. The usage of the term ‘epidemic’ here follows in similar fashion, being appropriated over time to describe certain biomedical conditions from a societal perspective, entering the popular imaginary, and finally being adopted in popular discourse as a way of describing phenomena that don’t readily fit with either the classical or biomedical definitions of the term. Contemporary deployments of the term as a way of describing the outcomes of changing patterns of behaviour demonstrate this popular misrepresentation of the theoretical concept: the ‘obesity epidemic’ and the ‘ice epidemic’ occupying newspaper headlines and current affairs programming both illustrate how the term transmutes into

⁵¹ Ed Cohen, 'Metaphorical immunity: A Case of Biomedical Fiction', *Literature and Medicine*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2003, pp. 143-4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.144.

popular discourse. It is necessary, however, to consider the genealogy of the term in order to justify its deployment as a conceptual container for approaching HIV/AIDS cultural production.

In epidemiology, disease is understood as being modulated by temporality and spatiality. To be considered an epidemic, the number of cases of a given disease in a specified place and period of time must exceed that which is considered ‘normal’ for that place. This, of course, assumes that there is an appropriate amount of disease that is to be tolerated within a population and a given locale at a certain point in time. Epidemic time is characterised by immediacy, exponentiality and rapidity. It is a time of crisis, panic and widespread loss. In contrast, when the number of cases of a disease is more or less maintained within the population of a given place, the disease is referred to as being endemic. Similarly, the delineation between epidemic and endemic disease is temporal and spatial; when the disease is spread (reproduced) at a rate that does not induce an exponential increase in the numbers of cases within a given geographic region but rather it is maintained at a relatively stable level within that population, it is considered to be endemic to that region. Both terms epidemic and endemic have roots in Ancient Greek that demonstrate their relationship to space, borders and belonging. Paul Martin and Estelle Martin-Granel trace the evolution of the term ‘epidemic’ throughout medical literature, noting that when Hippocrates penned his treatise on the spread of disease, he chose the term *epidemios* rather than the terms *nosos*, *phthoros*, or *loimos*, all of which were in more common use at the time.⁵³ Writing in 430 BCE, Hippocrates could have used the term *nosos*, which was used by Plato in the 4th century BCE and by Homer and Aeschylus two centuries earlier, and which “encompasses disease of the mind, body and soul”.⁵⁴ Similarly, the term *phthoros* was used by Aristophanes, Aeschylus, Plato and Thucydides to refer to “ruin, destruction, deterioration, damage, unhappiness, and loss” and the term *loimos* was in use in the 7th century BC by Esiodus, Sophocles and Herodotus to refer to a plague in terms of a scourge; this is the term used in the *Septuagint* to describe the ten plagues of Egypt in the Old Testament’s Book of Kings.⁵⁵ Yet rather than use these terms to describe the occurrence of diseases in a time

⁵³ Paul Martin and Estelle Martin-Granel, '2,500-year Evolution of the Term Epidemic', *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, vol. 12, no. 6, 2006, p. 976.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

and place, Hippocrates appropriated another unrelated term that was already in use at the time of writing. In the *Odyssey*, Homer uses the term *epidemios*, constituted by the preposition *epi* meaning on or above, and the noun *demos* meaning people, to refer to “those who are back home”; thus, in this context, *epidemios* “means indigenous or endemic”.⁵⁶ It is notable that Hippocrates reappropriated the term *epidemios* because it reframes the question of disease away from the individualist *nosos* or the alarmist *phthoros* and focuses on elements of temporality and spatiality that inform the ways in which diseases are experienced by a certain population in a certain time and place. For Hippocrates, the environmental specificities of a particular place at a particular time were of interest in terms of how they effected the distribution and manifestation of groupings of syndromic categories, thus *epi-demos* meaning “on the people/homeland”. The dynamic aspects of the term further establish a view of disease as something that invades a people/place from the outside. This is perhaps where the confusion lies in the distinction between epidemic and endemic when the terms emerged in Medieval Latin and French in the fifteenth century, with *epidemic* as referring to a disease affecting a group of people, and *endemic* referring to a characteristic native to a people or place. Thus we can see that the epidemic/endemic imaginary has obvious spatial elements, whereby an epidemic is conceptualised as something *happening to* a people or place, whereas when a disease is endemic it is conceptualised as *existing within* a people or place. Similarly, the epidemic/endemic imaginary has clear temporal elements, whereby the distinction between an endemic and epidemic is broadly delineated by the rate of reproduction of cases of the disease, with a more rapid rate of reproduction being the identifying factor of an epidemic. There is a third aspect of the epidemic/endemic imaginary that is of importance to its deployment as a conceptual framework in addressing the screen-mediated representation of HIV/AIDS: the role of the delineation between epidemic and endemic in approaching questions of biopower.

Speaking in 1976, eight years before his death from AIDS related illnesses and five years before the CDC asserted five cases of PCP in homosexual men in Los Angeles were the result of an immunological condition associated with homosexual sex, Michel Foucault spoke on biopolitics at the College de France:

⁵⁶ Ibid.

At the end of the eighteenth century, it was not epidemics that were the issue, but something else – what might broadly be called endemics, or in other words, the *form, nature, extension, duration, and intensity* of the illnesses prevalent in a population. These were illnesses that were difficult to eradicate and that were not regarded as epidemics that caused more frequent deaths, but as *permanent factors* which – and that is how they were dealt with – sapped the population's strength, shortened the working week, wasted energy, and cost money, both because they led to a fall in production and because treating them was expensive. In a word, illness as phenomena affecting a population. *Death was no longer something that suddenly swooped down on life* – as in an epidemic. Death was now something permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it and weakens it.⁵⁷

That a new epidemic would swoop down on life imbues this passage with a haunting paratext upon retrospective reading. The clinical latency of HIV - that is, the amount of time between acute infection and the emergence of AIDS-defining symptoms - further haunts this passage and Foucault's coetaneous work on biopolitics, as it is possible that the virus was already present in his system⁵⁸. The AIDS crisis era was defined by an epidemic temporality, and this sudden temporal shift is especially evident in the cultural responses to the crisis, as seropositive people bearing witness to their own contemporaneous trauma rushed to create cultural works in a form of self-memorialisation. Further, the equally sudden temporal shift that accompanied the transition to HIV-as-endemic through the introduction of combination therapy aligns with Foucault's biopolitical understanding of illness at the end of the eighteenth century, in which "death was now permanent, something that slips into life, perpetually gnaws at it, diminishes it, weakens it".⁵⁹ For Foucault, the emergent focus in biomedical governmentality on the permanent factors diminishing a population marks the beginning of the consolidation and transformation of sovereign power towards biopower, from a view of sovereign power as the right to "let live or make die" to the right to "make live or let die."⁶⁰ In an era in which humanity believed that infectious diseases had largely been overcome through the might of biomedical innovations, the exigency of the AIDS crisis produced significant temporal discourses. In using the terms of epidemic and endemic to contextualise the transition from the AIDS crisis era

⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*, Macmillan, 2003, Vol. 1, pp. 243-4., emphasis added.

⁵⁸ The clinical latency of the HIV virus ranges from 9 months to 20 years, with a median of 12 years (Victorian Health Department 2005).

⁵⁹ Foucault, p. 244.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.141.

to the ‘post-AIDS’ era and the ramifications of this temporal disjuncture on the screen mediation of HIV fiction, this framework illuminates the ways in which the representation of HIV and AIDS onscreen is structured through a biopolitical and spatiotemporal prism.

Whilst the epidemic/endemic conceptualisation is the overarching framework governing the approach to analysing HIV/AIDS screen fiction texts of the ‘post-AIDS’ era, it permeates three analytics: time, space, and biopower.

Methodology

Unlike Hart’s comprehensive survey of the US AIDS film genre that outlined several key tropes and thematics in the 1980s and 1990s AIDS films, the present study does not aim to provide a similar survey for more contemporary HIV/AIDS film representation. Rather, it focuses on a few paradigmatic examples from three key cinematic sites in which the meaning of HIV/AIDS in the ‘post-AIDS’ era are mediated and interrogated. This allows space to delve deeper into the filmic texts at the levels of narrative, form and aesthetics to elucidate how HIV/AIDS is articulated through the disjuncture under investigation.

Films selected for inclusion in this study are based on three parameters. Firstly, filmic texts were selected which could be understood as being conceived and produced in the ‘post-AIDS’ era; that is, filmic texts that were made after the transition from an epidemic to an endemic paradigm in their respective locales. Second, filmic texts were selected based on reception and distribution, whereby films that were included for analysis had either a theatrical release, were broadcast on either cable or terrestrial television networks, or, in the case of pornographic films, were released on DVD or available on streaming services. Third, in order to limit the scope of this study, the key films analysed were fictional texts in which HIV and/or AIDS serves as an important element of the narrative; that is, where a character in the filmic text is seropositive or ‘at-risk’ and their seropositivity or risk of seroconversion constitutes a central element of the plot.⁶¹ In the process of identifying relevant filmic texts, three disparate generic

⁶¹ As I demonstrate in Chapter Four, the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction are purposefully blurred in the case of bareback pornographic films.

groupings emerged: nostalgic films which reimagined the years of the AIDS crisis era; filmic texts which articulated a sense of global interconnectedness of HIV/AIDS and aimed to educate viewers about the virus; and pornographic texts which eroticised sexual practices imbricated in seroconversion.

As an interdisciplinary thesis with interventions into film studies, cultural studies and medical humanities, the analytical methods deployed in this thesis are varied. Firstly, each of the filmic texts is subject to close analysis, comprising analysis of the textual, formal, narrative and aesthetic components of the film texts. By scrutinising the selected films at this level, the ideological assumptions and representations concerning the cultural meaning of HIV/AIDS in the 'post-AIDS' era is revealed. The authorship and generic constraints of the filmic texts are addressed through this analysis. In addition to close analysis, I recognise that that these filmic texts exist within cultural *and* political contexts, and thus the political economy surrounding the filmic texts is analysed. Similarly, the paratextual aspects of the filmic texts are addressed, including press releases and public relations material produced to promote the films, film criticism and media reports concerning the reception of the films, and contexts of reception of each of the filmic texts. Cultural analysis is utilised in this thesis in order to radically contextualise the filmic representations of HIV/AIDS selected for inclusion in the study. Throughout these multiple analyses, three key analytic formations continuously resurfaced across the filmic texts - temporality, territory and biopolitics - which serve as the organising framework for writing up the analysis. I will outline these three analytic formations below as a prelude to their in-depth treatment in the analytical chapters.

Time: Epidemic/Endemic

In the AIDS crisis era, theorisations of time and temporality fell roughly into three categories, each of which characterises epidemic time. Firstly, the emergence of AIDS in an era in which techno-medical interventions into infectious diseases had been largely victorious presented the image of AIDS as an anachronicity. Susan Sontag likens AIDS to 'premodern' illnesses,⁶² as a collection of symptoms that were mysterious, unknowable and incurable; AIDS marked the end of an epoch in which

⁶² Sontag, p. 119.

humanity believed itself to be free from omnipresence of infectious diseases and a return to an earlier modality in which death “swooped down on life.”⁶³ Medieval scholar Stephen Kruger relates the periodisation of the AIDS crisis as anachronistic aporia to the problems inherent in the periodisation of the “modern”, “early modern” and “pre-modern” eras; Kruger argues that HIV/AIDS has persistently been characterised “as a break in modernity ... anything but modern, belonging both to the medieval world of “plague” and a “primitive” realm in which plagues are thought to have their contemporary origins.”⁶⁴ Medical historian Charles Rosenberg takes account of the dramaturgy of the epidemic, illustrating the contradictory temporal assignments of the AIDS crisis, which is at once “very traditional” (in that the aporia of AIDS brought forth a “renactment” of the dramaturgy of the premodern epidemic), “very modern” (insofar as both its rapid spread and rapid epistemological production were contingent on factors of modernity such as globalisation and techno-science) and “very postmodern” (in that the proliferation of discourse surrounding AIDS is understood to have constructed AIDS).⁶⁵ What emerges from these tendencies within temporal theorisations of AIDS during the crisis years is that AIDS is radically untimely, an anachronistic “plague”. This anachronistic “plague” discourse emanates through the second category of temporal accounts of AIDS, that of apocalypticism. Epidemic time is overwhelmingly characterised by its signifying function as the harbinger of the “end”. The AIDS crisis has been represented in terms of a postmodern apocalypse to the point of cliché; similarly, Lee Edelman traces the representation of the AIDS crisis as a particularly “postmodern” condition, a condition that signifies not only the death of the individual subject but the postmodern “death of the subject”, in Jamesonian terms. As symbol of the end times, writes theological scholar Thomas Long, “the apocalypse is equally at home at the service of radicals and reactionaries”;⁶⁶ that is to say that apocalyptic discourses of the AIDS crisis served the function of mobilising support for addressing the crisis whilst also served as evidence for Christian social conservatives of

⁶³ Foucault.

⁶⁴ Steven F Kruger, 'Medieval/Postmodern: HIV/AIDS and the Temporality of Crisis', in Glenn Burger and Steven F Kruger (eds), *Queering the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2001, p. 256.

⁶⁵ Charles E Rosenberg, 'What is an Epidemic? AIDS in Historical Perspective', *Daedalus*, vol. 118, no. 2, 1989.

⁶⁶ Thomas L Long, *AIDS and American Apocalypticism: The Cultural Semiotics of an Epidemic*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2005, p. 9.

visions of America as the new Sodom. Prominent AIDS activist Larry Kramer made frequent connections between the conditions that presupposed the Holocaust in Nazi Germany and the conditions that allowed the AIDS crisis to reach such disastrous levels in the United States⁶⁷ whilst simultaneously the emergent evangelical Christian Right “configured homosexuality as a plague as well as a harbinger of Sodomish doom.”⁶⁸ Thirdly, time has been theorised within extant AIDS cultural criticism in terms of the lived experience of people with AIDS. Where AIDS is envisioned as an anachronism and as an apocalypse, for the individual subject, AIDS represents the radical truncation of a lifespan and the attendant effects of this truncation on the individual’s experience of the passage of time. Concomitantly, there was a proliferation of works of memory, and in particular, of AIDS testimony. The AIDS memoir, argues Tougaw, embodies ACT-UP’s slogan that “Silence = Death” through the presupposition that writing will equate to life, however the function of the testimonial AIDS memoir is not only to disseminate knowledge in the form of a self-help book for people with AIDS, but also actively bearing witness to a contemporaneous crisis; testimonial AIDS narratives “would not exist if death did not seem imminent for their authors, nor would they be written if their authors did not see writing as a vehicle for survival.”⁶⁹ What these three categories of accounts of temporality in the AIDS crisis demonstrate is that epidemic time conjures a sense of temporality that produces an epistemology of AIDS as anachronistic, apocalyptic, and testimonial.

Time and temporality also feature heavily in extant cinematic theory. For Henri Bergson, the cinema functions as the technological incarnation of a representation of the falsity of time, of images of time that are only able to manifest by disavowing the temporal in favour of the spatial. In Bergson’s view, the cinema is only able to represent time through spatialisation: the movement from one frame to the next, “such is the contrivance of the cinematograph ... we take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality.”⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze recovers Bergson’s rejection of the cinematic apparatus’

⁶⁷ John Charles Goshert, 'The Aporia of AIDS and/as Holocaust', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2005, p. 49.

⁶⁸ Thomas Lawrence Long, 'The Mark of the Beast is the Glory of the Pariah: AIDS Apocalypticism of Diamanda Galás and David Wojnarowicz', *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2012, p. 228.

⁶⁹ Tougaw, p. 169.

⁷⁰ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell, London, Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1922, p. 322.

ability to represent time by arguing that early (pre-WWII) cinema is governed by the “movement-image”, a spatialised representation of time-as-movement, and that there was a necessary shift post-war that enabled a new form of cinematic temporal representation, the “time-image”, which represented the temporal directly.⁷¹ Mary-Anne Doane argues that the cinematic apparatus itself significantly contributes to the conceptualisation of time and temporality in modernity. For Doane, the cinema “engages multiple temporalities”, in that there is a temporality to the mechanical apparatus itself (“linear, irreversible, ‘mechanical’”), a temporality of the diegesis in terms of the representation of time through an image, and a temporality of the reception, whereby the spectator is admonished to “honour the relentless temporality of the apparatus.”⁷² Time and temporality are not merely of theoretical interest to film theorists, but also to practitioners. Many scholars have illustrated Andrei Tarkovsky’s temporal obsession (most notably Deleuze, who cites Tarkovsky’s films frequently in *Cinema 2*), and so has Tarkovsky himself. In articulating his filmmaking manifesto, Tarkovsky describes the process of filmmaking as “sculpting in time”, however, as Nariman Skakov notes, the Russian word that Tarkovsky adopts is ‘*vaiat*’, which is associated the verb ‘*vit*’, “to weave”; in this sense, rather than the purely spatial analogy of sculpting in time, Tarkovsky’s films can be understood in terms of the Deleuzian time-image, whereby they “have a certain complex texture, a textile labyrinth, where the relationship between individual temporal threads (past-present-future) is not immediately apparent.”⁷³ Temporality is a key concern of the AIDS film, from the axiomatic meditations on time in the mainstream AIDS film genre of the crisis era, to the more complex temporal axes of New Queer Cinema films, a genre that is succinctly characterised by Monica B. Pearl by films that are “fragmented, non-narrative, and ahistorical.”⁷⁴ Similarly, temporality factors into HIV screen culture in the endemic ‘post-AIDS’ era, either by way of nostalgia or post-apocalypticism.

⁷¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, London, Athlone, 1989, p. 27.

⁷² Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 30.

⁷³ Nariman Skakov, *The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time*, London and New York, IB Tauris, 2012, p. 13.

⁷⁴ Monica B Pearl, ‘AIDS and New Queer Cinema’, in Michele Aaron (ed.), *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*, New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 2004, p. 23.

Epidemic time is portrayed through the contradictory temporal metaphors of being at once anachronistic and modern (or possibly postmodern) - that is, both timely and untimely - in addition to being articulated in apocalyptic terms both by those in implicated communities and those seeking to further disenfranchise the implicated. Further, the apocalyptic tendency and the effects of the crisis on the individual and social experience of time, in addition to the drive within AIDS activism to demand a stake within the “plague of discourse,”⁷⁵ provoke the production of artefacts of memory, bearing witness to the unfolding crisis. The temporal schism induced by the “Protease Moment” and the attendant transition from epidemic to endemic invokes a shift in temporality. Where epidemic time is (un)timely by virtue of its dissonance with broad cultural assumptions about the victory of techno-medicine over infectious disease, endemic time engenders anachronicity through the dual-bind of HIV as both omnipresent and invisible; the ‘end of AIDS’ thus incorrectly signals the end of HIV. Where epidemic time is articulated as apocalyptic, endemic time can be understood as post-apocalyptic, bereft of both the exigency and sense of purpose that encapsulated the crisis era. Where epidemic time demands the bearing of witness and the archival of the present - a forward-gazing subjectivity - endemic time gazes backward, circulating nostalgic representation of the crisis.

The epidemic time of the AIDS crisis is characterised by a sense of urgency in the face of the rapid marching on of death. Life expectancies are truncated, confusion begets fear, loss on a massive scale induces helplessness and trauma. In epidemic time, life is volatile and condensed, able to be swooped upon from above. The temporality of crisis produces a compression of time. As John Nguyet Erni argued, the incongruity of the discourse surrounding AIDS as both curable and incurable brings forth a temporal paradox: the incurability of AIDS engenders a fatalistic feeling that demands urgency, yet the “perception of the curability of AIDS turns time into a highly productive discourse.”⁷⁶ Yet the AIDS crisis was also represented as a temporal aberration, an “anachronistic irruption into the modern” existing as an outlier to the consensus of the second-half of the twentieth century that biomedical technologies were victorious

⁷⁵ Lee Edelman, 'The Plague of Discourse: Politics, Literary Theory, and AIDS', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 88, no. 1, 1989, p. 301.

⁷⁶ John Nguyet Erni, *Unstable Frontiers: Technomedicine and the Cultural Politics of "Curing" AIDS*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p. 70.

against disease.⁷⁷ Kruger notes that the AIDS crisis invoked widespread temporal Othering, of processes which “operate *temporally* to remove HIV/AIDS not only from spatial and social proximity but also from a present, proximate *moment*.”⁷⁸ The exigency of the AIDS crisis demanded this form of temporal definition because the “untimeliness” of such a widespread and unknowable disease problematised logics of progress in modernity. The AIDS crisis itself was “out of time”, as Kruger illustrates in accounting for the discourses of AIDS-as-medieval. The divergent temporalities of the epidemic and endemic eras are manifest not only in the phenomenological experience of the passing of time - time’s compression and expansion - but also in the differing modes of temporal structure. The temporal schism invoked by the transition from epidemic to endemic time is thus generative and productive; the immediacy of death in the crisis era produced modulations of temporality which accentuated contemporaneity, whilst the redoubling of temporal disjuncture conjured up by the “protease moment” produced a second untimeliness of HIV/AIDS that matured into a backwards gaze. Endemic time is therefore constructed by a nostalgic obsession and a mundane post-apocalypticism where the maintenance of death (thanatopolitics) is replaced by the maintenance of life (biopolitics).

With the temporal schism of the transition from epidemic to endemic time, trauma is manifest by way of a nostalgic obsession. Whilst the epidemic era was culturally typified by both works of activism and works of memorialisation, the endemic era appears to be stuck on returning to the AIDS crisis years. Endemic time is characterised by the sudden shock of death sentences becoming life sentences, of a return to the mundane. AIDS activist Eric Rofes refers to this as the “Lazarus Moment”:

Careers, boyfriends, credit card bills, and plans for old age, the flotsam and jetsam of everyday middle-class life, increasingly seize centre stage as the epidemic recedes into the past, fading away like a very bad dream. AIDS seems over, and so we come back to life.⁷⁹

Yet despite the return of mundane middle-class accoutrements, the trauma and spectacle of the AIDS crisis retains its place in the visual hierarchy of HIV imagery in screen culture, as the peak of the endemic era witnesses multiple returns to the time of

⁷⁷ Kruger, p. 256.

⁷⁸ Ibid., emphasis in original.

⁷⁹ Rofes, p. 4.

the epidemic. As the visual ascesis of HIV produced new serological categories (such as “positive, undetectable”) that rendered HIV an invisible, internal condition, HIV/AIDS screen representation was confronted with its own crisis of representation: how to represent the mundane, the invisible? The definition of endemic time relies on the repudiation of that which it is not; it defines itself by way of excluding the temporal regimes that constitute epidemic time. Therefore, endemic time is characterised by the mundane calm after the catastrophic storm, by the lack of crisis. In endemic time, the focus shifts from mitigating death to maintaining life, and exigency is replaced with an “ordinariness”, yet this ordinariness remains haunted by the traumatic recent past and lacks the language needed to articulate its political drive. In endemic time, the contradictory processes that render HIV invisible bring forth a fractured temporality, with one nostalgic eye gazing back to an epidemic past and another stagnating in a present that is biopolitically determined by continual, cyclical maintenance of life. The pharmacological revolutions that enable undetectability and chemoprophylactic strategies that produce the possibility of HIV as a “non-issue” are met with a resurgence in screen-mediated fiction that bespeaks a longing for the epidemic imaginary. Svetlana Boym argues that feelings of nostalgia are coeval with temporal shifts:

Somehow progress didn’t cure nostalgia but exacerbated it. Similarly, globalisation encouraged stronger local attachments. In counterpoint to our fascination with cyberspace and the virtual global village, there is a no less global epidemic of nostalgia, an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world. Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defence mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals.⁸⁰

It is this “epidemic of nostalgia” that constitutes one aspect of endemic time. AIDS nostalgia performs a museological function on the one hand, accounting for and preserving cultural memory of a period of intense loss. On the other, it functions as a reflection of the aporia of the endemic era. The obsession of revising the epidemic imaginary can be both reparative and nostalgic. Whilst the emergence of nostalgia as an illness in the sixteenth century draws from an understanding of a longing for a homeland, real or imagined, it manifests as a longing for a bygone time. Heather Love suggests that this nostalgic push is constitutive of the affective temporal particularities

⁸⁰ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2001, p. xiv.

of queer existence, of a “backwards feeling”⁸¹ that recalls homophobic suffering of the pre-Stonewall era, the trials of Oscar Wilde and the destruction of Sodom; in this context, the backwards gaze from the endemic era to the epidemic era of the AIDS crisis represents a logical turn in queer consciousness and cultural memory. For Nishant Shahani, this backwards turn has reparative potential, as the processes of a queer retrospection, or “queer retrosexuality”, enable an historiographical reparation to a traumatic past. As narratives of queer “progress” tend more and more towards inclusion in the neoliberal “promise”, Shahani sees the backwards turn as offering the potential for addressing historical trauma:

We are a confused bunch of queers because we have moved and progressed into a future without quite being allowed to process the painful realities of our damaged and traumatic pasts. Since trauma remains fundamentally unrepresentable at the moment of its occurring, it is only after the fact that the catastrophic event can be processed or adequately grappled with. In other words, a reparative response to the traumatic event can, in some sense, only take place in retrospect.⁸²

HIV/AIDS screen-mediated fiction in the endemic era is preoccupied with this reparative return to the epidemic. However, in attempting to represent the HIV present, we see a temporality structured by what Lauren Berlant calls “slow death”, which “prosper[s] not in traumatic events” but in “temporal environments whose qualities and whose counters in time and space are often identified with the presentness of ordinariness itself, that domain of living on.”⁸³ (2007, p.759). In contrast to the rapid deaths of “events” - Berlant refers to genocides and military encounters, but the same could apply to the AIDS crisis - slow death inhabits “environments”, encompassing spaces that “can absorb how time ordinarily passes” The mundane ordinariness of the endemic era, which must reach to nostalgia in order to produce melodrama, fails to recognise within itself the ongoing drama of the maintenance and reproduction of life that coexists with a slow death.

The delineation between epidemic and endemic time is geocorpographic; that is, it is determined by the virology and biomedical corporeality of HIV in a particular

⁸¹ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 2009.

⁸² Shahani, p. 148.

⁸³ Lauren Berlant, 'Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2007, p. 760.

geopolitical economic context. The three key characteristics of endemic time - anachronism, post-apocalypticism, nostalgia - shepherd the temporal analysis of the screen-mediated fiction texts in this thesis. In the emergent genre of films which retrospectively depict the 'AIDS crisis' era, a sense of anachronism is engendered through the nostalgic gaze, as the temporal dissonance between an imagined 'apocalyptic' tendency and a contemporary 'post-apocalyptic' tendency is emphasised. In the 'global event film' genre which attempts to raise awareness of the global dimensions of HIV/AIDS, the world is territorialised and 'patterns' of AIDS are delineated through their adherence to temporal modalities of the virus, constructing an imagined 'Africa' as the anachronistic, primitive origin of the virus and 'the West' as its post-apocalyptic present, with 'China' somewhere in between. Similarly, in the education-entertainment genre, epidemic and endemic temporalities are codified through divergent health messaging that constructs 'Africa' as anachronistically 'backward' in comparison to a 'progressive' donor West. Emergent aesthetics within the genre of bareback gay pornography enunciate an attempt at representing 'real time' through a cinema verite convention, depicting practices and serofraternities that can be read alternatively as nostalgic for pre-AIDS gay sexual culture, as anachronistic for their defiant refusal to submit to sanctioned forms of reproductivity, or as post-apocalyptic in their mediation of the virus through chemoprophylaxis. Whilst the temporality of the lived experience of HIV/AIDS and the attendant temporal schism invoked by the 'end of AIDS' functions to both modulate and inhibit HIV screen-mediated fiction, it is not the only axis impacting HIV/AIDS cultural production. Through geocorpographic delineations, the epidemic/endemic temporality of HIV/AIDS is further constituted by the intersection of forms of spatial and biopolitical governance.

Space: Epidemic/Endemic

Michel Foucault introduces *The Birth of the Clinic* by stating that it "is a book about space, about language, and about death."⁸⁴ For Foucault, epidemics spring forth and demand from governmentality a form of spatial reconfiguration: restrictions on the movement of bodies through space by way of quarantine, designation of zones and the maintenance of circulation within space. Accordingly, the spatial regimes engendered

⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan, London, Tavistock Publications Ltd., 1973.

by the AIDS crisis have been articulated in terms of the way that the crisis demands spatial governance. For example, the implementation of border control regimes for plasma products,⁸⁵ the closure of spaces of gay male public sex,⁸⁶ and restrictions on the movement of HIV positive people across borders⁸⁷ can all be understood as outcomes of a territorial governmentality. Conversely, existing regimes of territorial governance inform the virological progression of HIV. For example, the economic and political aspects of the nation-state as a territorial entity, rather than the biological features of the virus, overwhelmingly determine HIV outcomes.⁸⁸ Similarly, the association of the urban with danger and the rural with safety produce divergent HIV realities in these spatial imaginings.⁸⁹

Not only is the epidemic spatially ordered, but so too is the virus cartographically structured. Like the genome, the virus itself is mapped, represented spatially. The spatialisation and mapping of the various sub-types of the virus also produce geographic and economic inequalities for HIV treatment. Johanna Crane notes that “virological and molecular biology research on HIV treatment have traditionally focussed almost entirely on the genetic ‘strain’ or subtype of HIV found predominantly in North America, Europe and Australia”⁹⁰ the focus on the genetic subtype B of the virus as a “reference strain” for research has meant that many ARV treatments that are successful in seropositives with this strain - most of whom live in the Global North - have been less successful when applied to non-B strains of the virus, which “constitute

⁸⁵ Farrell.

⁸⁶ See: Allan Bérubé, 'The History of Gay Bathhouses', *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 44, no. 3-4, 2003., Ralph Bolton, John Vincke, and Rudolf Mak, 'Gay Baths Revisited: An Empirical Analysis', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1994.,

Scott Burris, 'Legal Aspects of Regulating Bathhouses: Cases from 1984 to 1995', *Journal of Homosexuality*, vol. 44, no. 3-4, 2003.,

Christopher Disman, 'The San Francisco Bathhouse Battles of 1984: Civil Liberties, AIDS Risk, and Shifts in Health Policy', *ibid.*, p. ^pp.Cited Pages|.,

Judith A Rabin, 'The AIDS Epidemic and Gay Bathhouses: A Constitutional Analysis', *Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law*, vol. 10, no. 4, 1986.

⁸⁷ Manuel Carballo and Harald Siem, *Migration, Migration Policy and AIDS*, London, Taylor & Francis, 1996.

⁸⁸ Ed Cohen, 'Immune Communities, Common Immunities', *Social Text*, vol. 26, no. 1 94, 2008.

⁸⁹ Rebecca Hodes, 'Diseased Dystopias? HIV/AIDS and the South African city in Yesterday and Tsotsi', *Postamble*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2008.

⁹⁰ Johanna T Crane, 'Viral Cartographies: Mapping the Molecular Politics of Global HIV', *BioSocieties*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2011, p. 144.

nearly 90 per cent of the world's infections."⁹¹ As such, Crane argues that the geopolitics of HIV/AIDS, which already contribute to significant spatially-divergent experiences of HIV/AIDS by virtue of secondary factors of health outcomes such as economic and health inequality, are similarly present at the molecular level, "in laboratories where our knowledge about the molecular biology of HIV and ARVs is produced."⁹² In this sense, the seemingly objective task of "mapping" the virus is revealed as "*productive* of certain possibilities."⁹³

Drawing on Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory, Joost van Loon designates "epidemic space" as the site within which the "microphysics of infection and the microphysics of epidemics" meet; that is, a conceptualisation of virulent pathogens as "active agent[s] in the ordering of [their] own 'epidemic space.'"⁹⁴ van Loon's "epidemic space" is dense with intersections of the various actors within the schema of disease, and one in which the pathogen virulence interrupts the "smooth" functioning of the network and "undermines its coherence."⁹⁵ In contrast, argues van Loon, when an epidemic is "normalised" and the pathogen becomes knowable and manageable (though the epistemological function of the governmentality of public health discourse), it can be considered endemic, as its "problematic nature tends to fade away as a 'matter of fact.'"⁹⁶ The exemplar "epidemic space" in van Loon's conceptualisation is that of the hospital ward, dense with actors (pathogens, medical apparatus, the ill, medical staff) which act as "cultural vectors" who amplify the set of pathogenic flows within the space and present further risks to patients "whose immunity is likely to already have been compromised by whatever brought them to seek medical attention in the first place."⁹⁷ Whilst van Loon's conceptualisation of the spatiality of the epidemic provides a useful framework for interrogating pathogenic transmission and risk, it does little to give insight to the broader spatial regimes invoked by virulence or the differentialisation of space, particularly in relation to how the political economy produces spaces that can be

⁹¹ Spira in *ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.145.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Joost van Loon, 'Epidemic Space', *Critical Public Health*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2005, p. 40.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.45.

more- or less-vulnerable to an epidemic crisis. Similarly, van Loon's formulation of epidemic space conceptualises space as being populated by actors (or nodes) who interact with each other, forming the trajectories within the space which define its risk profile. This form of spatial analysis has the potential of concealing or obfuscating the particularities of that space. In *City of Plagues*, Susan Craddock argues that "a discussion of the body is inadequate without an accompanying discussion of place" because "space is not simply a passive container but a dynamic actor in the production of social relations."⁹⁸ It is thus necessary to produce a conceptualisation of the spatiality of infectious disease that seeks to understand how epidemic space is structured and experienced and how endemic space is structured and experienced.

I propose a territorialised account of the epidemic/endemic binary that characterises epidemic space as that which falls under the governmentality and regulation of epidemic time. In epidemic space, the virus is territorialised and subject to measures of containment; it is imagined as existing visibly and detectably within defined spaces. Its movement and transmission is regulated and monitored, and it is culturally articulated as being proper to a place. Epidemic space is subject a thanatopolitical spatial regime in which the management of death - its isolation, containment, and spatial political mobilisation - subjugates the biopolitical imperative to maintaining life. In contrast, the spatial practices I designate as operating under the locus of 'endemic space' are characterised by a lack of spatial visibility and a laxity in spatial governance, but a renewed focus on issues of access and equity. In endemic, 'post-AIDS' time, the virus is subject to a form of biopolitical governance that demarcates the borders of the individual subject rather than the borders of the virus. As the virus retreats to levels of 'undetectability' and fails to graduate into AIDS, its prevalence within space becomes similarly invisible and dispersed.

The temporal distancing afforded by restorative nostalgia and reparative returns to the AIDS epidemic during the 'post-AIDS' era finds an indexical partner in the form of the logic of spatial distance in the contemporary moment. Returning to the etymological origins of the term, we recall that the earlier use of *epidemos* by Homer in the *Odyssey* - from which Hippocrates borrows for the title of his volumes on diseases -

⁹⁸ Susan Craddock, *City of Plagues: Disease, Poverty, and Deviance in San Francisco*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2000, pp. 7-8.

is geopolitical. As Martin and Martin-Granel outline, the first emergence of the term in Homer's *Odyssey* is framed within a geopolitical context, in referring to "who is back home", and the term *epedemeo* "was used by Thucydides (460 BC - 395 BC) to mean 'to stay in one's own country,' in contrast to *apodemeo*, 'to be absent from one's own country.'"⁹⁹ Thus the original meaning of the term epidemic is grounded, so to speak, firmly in the construction of socio-spatial differentialisation and of the relationship between people and place. That is to say, that the original meaning of epidemic was, in fact, indigenous or 'endemic.'¹⁰⁰ Within the logic of the epidemic/endemic eras of AIDS, the spatial distance is produced both between and within the Euro-American nexus of AIDS cultural production during the AIDS crisis era, as the contemporary impact of AIDS-as-crisis recedes from those countries where HAART is available and affordable and shifts to regions without this luxury. The new spatial delineation between the antiretroviral 'haves' and 'have-nots' performs the work of recasting the 'post-AIDS' Global North away from an epidemic imaginary and into the logics of the manageable endemic. Yet this transition in the telos of HIV/AIDS is only able to function by mobilising a spatial logic that resituates the AIDS epidemic, producing a spatialised distance between the contemporary and the crisis. From the perspective of the 'post-AIDS' Global North, the AIDS epidemic is thus imagined as a problem from 'another time' through the rise of AIDS nostalgia in screen culture, or as a problem of 'another place' through the delineations produced through the conceptualisation of global AIDS as distinct 'patterns'.

A spatial analysis of HIV/AIDS screen culture is important for three reasons. Firstly, as the "protease moment" resulted in such a rapid shift in the meaning of HIV/AIDS in the Global North and sparked the transition from the AIDS epidemic to the 'post-AIDS' endemic era, geopolitical boundaries further marked the biopolitical delineations of health outcomes for people living with HIV. As the effectiveness and accessibility of HAART increased in the Global North and the AIDS crisis receded, the disparity between experiences of HIV in the Global North and the Global South became increasingly pronounced, and the attendant imagination of the personification of AIDS shifted away from subjects constructed on the basis of proximity to deviant practices and toward subjects constructed *through* proximity itself. Secondly, these disparate

⁹⁹ Martin and Martin-Granel, pp. 976-7.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

outcomes occur at a crucial moment in the history of supranational governance. The rise of securitisation in the wake of the ‘age of terror’ and the attendant reinforcement of violent regimes of border control situates the global, supranational project of the governance and management of the AIDS crisis within the context geopolitical insecurity. Recent populist and nationalist critiques of globalisation – most notably, the UK’s decision to leave the European Union, the response of many European nations to the Syrian refugee crisis and the election of a putatively anti-globalist President in the United States – similarly indicate the reinforcement of territorialised regimes of governance and the implications for addressing a virus that is oblivious to geopolitical borders. Coetaneous with this focus are the transnational flows of cultural production and distribution of HIV/AIDS screen texts. Finally, the logic of epidemic, with its etymological origins bespeaking its concerns of notions of ‘home’ and ‘away’ and diseases conceptualised as collections of symptoms affecting people in a specific place, highlights the spatial regimes that modulate and define transmissible viruses, within the body of the subject and the body of the nation-state. These three mobilisations of spatial delineation serve to frame the construction of HIV/AIDS in the ‘post-AIDS’ era imaginary of the Global North as the spatial indexing of an epidemic/endemic binary.

The supranational designation of ‘patterns’ of AIDS marks, as Cindy Patton argues,¹⁰¹ a return to the dominance of modes of “tropical thinking” in AIDS medicine, replacing the “epidemiological thinking” that dominated the AIDS-as-epidemic era in the Global North. Tropical thinking emerges from the narrativisation and imaginary of diseases that are “understood to be proper to a place, to a *there*, but only to operate *as disease* when it afflicted people from *here*;¹⁰² that is, that disease is contextualised geographically. Within the locus of the “diasporal drama of displacement”, tropical thinking functions as a “melodramatic narrative of sensibility [which produces] a family drama in which incursion into the constructed domestic space of the colony was accompanied by nostalgia for ‘going home.’”¹⁰³ Epidemic space is largely governed by tropical thinking, as spatial containment of disease. In contrast, epidemiological thinking imagines not the narrative of place but the surveillable pathogen and its sequential movement through space; the construction of a space-time of disease.

¹⁰¹ Patton.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.35.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.37.

However, in order to make epidemics visible, “epidemiology had to constantly construct and correlate populations and subpopulations”, visualising “the march of bodies that made visible the temporal sequence called ‘epidemic.’”¹⁰⁴ Through the construction of its ‘risk groups’ and focus on vectors, practices and behaviours rather than a focus on localised conditions, the dramaturgy of epidemiological thinking is imagined through the construction spatio-temporal prism of movement, whereas tropical thinking is grounded in the construction of imaginaries of place. The Global North’s AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s was squarely framed in epidemiological terms; AIDS was produced in the cultural imaginary as a disease that affected specific ‘risk groups’ engaged in various ‘risky’ behaviours. However, as Patton suggests, the emergence of HAART in the Global North and the transition to a ‘post-AIDS’, endemic imaginary also produced a return to tropical thinking in the global supranational approach to HIV. The implicated bodies of ‘risk groups’ as the symbolic representation of AIDS was, at this moment, translocated onto a geopolitical imaginary, as the “face of AIDS” was culturally articulated not through deviant practices but through geographical location within “developing *countries*, symbolised by and as Africa.”¹⁰⁵ As John Nguyet Erni argues, this return to a tropical mode of imagining the HIV pandemic is manifest in the World Health Organisation’s production of three discrete ‘patterns’ of AIDS which simultaneously render “a mundane sort of spatial and temporal order to the global epidemic” in addition to designating “the shift from homosexual to heterosexual AIDS.”¹⁰⁶ Noteworthy here is the delineation of these patterns, whereby ‘Pattern I’, referring to the experience of HIV in the Global North as being situated within the ‘risk groups’ of haemophiliacs, homosexuals, injecting drug users and sex workers; that is, HIV as imagined through the epidemiological logic of pathogens and vectors. In contrast, ‘Pattern II’ refers to ‘African AIDS’, or a generalised heterosexual epidemic, and ‘Pattern III’ refers to ‘Asian AIDS’, imagined as the place where the AIDS epidemic ‘arrived late’; in both of these patterns, AIDS is described in terms of place rather than practice.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.40.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.130., emphasis in original

¹⁰⁶ John Nguyet Erni, 'Epidemic Imaginary: Performing Global Figurations of “Third World AIDS”', *Space and Culture*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2006, p. 341.

The transition from an epidemic to an endemic HIV imaginary in the Global North coincides with the reframing of the AIDS epidemic from a health issue to an issue of global security. Whereas the key concerns within epidemic space relate to containment and management of death and afflicted bodies within the imagined hygienic space of the nation-state - that is, thanatopolitical concerns - the dispersal and deterritorialisation of the enduring, “liveable” virus in endemic space demands a form of biopower less concerned with the management of death and more concerned with the maintenance of life and the extraction of value from that life. The delineating factor between epidemic and endemic spaces can be construed as a geocorpographic division: the foundational requirements for the social and material production of epidemic/endemic space are determined by the totalising corporeal effect engendered by proximity to antiretroviral treatment, which in turn is determined by the position of the nation-state within a globalised, neoliberal geopolitics. The transition of the thanatopolitically-governed AIDS-afflicted body to the biopolitically-governed asymptomatic HIV-positive body is thus determined by that body’s geopolitical location within a global system in which national borders produce economic barriers or enablers to accessing treatment; in turn, the temporality of epidemic/endemic space aligns with its geocorpography. Global health inequities thus construct coetaneous, adjacent zones of epidemic and endemic space. As the Global North, and in particular North America and Western Europe, transitioned away from epidemic space at the turn of the twenty-first century, an immunitarian logic permeated supranational bodies in relation to the global politics of HIV/AIDS. The Global North’s ability to maintain endemic space is therefore contingent on its exclusion of the epidemic Global South body. In January 2000, the United Nations Security Council designated AIDS as a threat to global security.¹⁰⁷ The securitisation discourse surrounding the supranational global approach to AIDS was further solidified in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States and the resultant ‘war on terror’. The attendant militarisation of borders and increased anxiety around global mobility institute corporeal effects, and this is particularly pertinent in relation to the supranational global governance of AIDS. Recasting AIDS as an issue of global security rather than global health reinforces the production of “violent cartographies;” that is, “historically developed, socially

¹⁰⁷ Colleen O'Manique, *Neoliberalism and AIDS Crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa: Globalization's Pandemic*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 36.

embedded interpretations of identity and space”¹⁰⁸ which are “constituted as inter-articulations of geographic imaginaries and antagonisms, based on models of identity-difference.”¹⁰⁹ The securitisation of AIDS, occurring at the confluence of the Global North’s transition from AIDS epidemic to HIV endemic, produces a particular form of biopolitical cartographic violence that governs global HIV and formulates radical disparities of seropositivity *onto* the body of the subject along geopolitical lines; securitisation constitutes the “enmeshment of the flesh and blood of the body within the geopolitics of war, race and empire.”¹¹⁰ As the goal of global efforts to mitigate the virus shifts from managing the mass deaths of the epidemic and towards maintaining life within the endemic, regimes of spatialisation are emphasised through the necessity to focus on the containment of virus, both within the individual body and in relation to the boundaries of the nation-state. The spatial anxieties produced by the threat of the virus to the body of the subject and body of the state are both managed and mitigated through a biometric gaze that becomes increasingly dominant due to the visual ascesis of AIDS in the endemic era.

Coetaneous with the corporeal violence, both real and abstract, emerging from the securitisation of AIDS are the transnational cultural flows that influence the cultural articulation of HIV and AIDS. Prior to the epidemic of AIDS nostalgia that emerged in the 2010s, AIDS cultural production in the Global North developed a supranational focus. The growing disparities in the state of affairs of the pandemic between the Global North and Global South was met with a globalised response led by the United States. UNAIDS, the WHO, PEPFAR (the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) and private charities such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have been actively involved in the funding, production and distribution of transnational HIV/AIDS screen fiction. The manufacture of cultural products of entertainment-education as vehicles for behaviour change in HIV/AIDS communication in the Global South by supranational bodies exemplify the concerted transnational flows of HIV epistemologies from North to South. As vehicles for communication of development messaging, these

¹⁰⁸ Michael J Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. ix.

¹⁰⁹ Michael J Shapiro, 'The New Violent Cartography', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2007, pp. 293-4.

¹¹⁰ Joseph Pugliese, 'Geocorpographies of Torture', *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2007, p. 12.

supranational films also function through a “donor gaze;”¹¹¹ that is, they perpetuate the notion that the AIDS-afflicted Global South is the burden of North. These transnational flows highlight the ways in which screen fiction is conceptualised as a useful means of HIV education in the Global South, yet they also demonstrate the continuing push to control the discourse around HIV in these spaces; as such, they illustrate how imperialist agendas are able to reproduce within the context of the ‘Global village’.

Mark Shiel contends that cinema is “primarily a spatial system”, to the extent that spatiality determines cinema moreso than textuality.¹¹² The spatialisation of HIV/AIDS is demonstrated through both the forms of cinematic spatiality conveyed in the HIV/AIDS screen-mediated fiction in addition to the role of geopolitical spatial imaginaries in structuring the production and dissemination of HIV/AIDS cultural texts. In the ‘AIDS retrovision’ genre, it is not merely a particular historical moment that is being reimagined, but the spatial arrangement of that particular moment. In this sense, AIDS nostalgia films become not only paeans to the historical moment of the AIDS crisis but also to the spaces that the epidemic significantly shaped spatialisation, particularly the cities in which the impact of AIDS was spatially concentrated due to existence of gay villages. Sarah Schulman charts the relationship between the AIDS crisis and the rapid urban gentrification of inner-city areas in cities with historically large gay populations such as New York City. The historical economic dynamics of ‘white flight’ to the suburbs and the resultant decline in city revenues over the course of three decades resulted, in the 1970s, with New York City facing bankruptcy.¹¹³ A concerted effort to convert low-income inner-city housing in Manhattan to luxury housing to attract higher-income residents tragically coincided with the emergence of the AIDS epidemic and New York City’s gay districts of Chelsea and the East and West Villages as the epicentres, and “the appearance and rapid spread of AIDS and consequential death rates coincidentally enhanced the gentrification process that was already underway.”¹¹⁴ In AIDS nostalgia films, we see not only a recreation of a

¹¹¹ Regina Kessy, *Decoding the Donor Gaze: Documentary, Aid and AIDS in Africa*, University of Huddersfield, 2014.

¹¹² Mark Shiel, 'Cinema and the City in History and Theory', in Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (eds), *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2001, pp. 5-6.

¹¹³ Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012, p. 25.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.26.

specific era, but a recreation of the historically gay neighbourhoods and of pre-gentrified cities. Similarly, the spatiality of HIV/AIDS emerges in the reimagining of the territorialised spatial logics of epidemic time: of isolation of the afflicted body within designated zones of exclusion, and of the role of spatial regimes in enabling access to new treatments. The territoriality of HIV/AIDS is also illustrated through the spatial configurations that produce the supranational entertainment-education productions in which the geocorpographic differences of HIV/AIDS are explored. Within ‘realist’ bareback pornography and cinematic texts addressing bareback sex, zones of risk and pleasure are spatially contrasted with zones with domesticity and safety.

In Henri Lefebvre’s account of the processes of spatialisation, he contends that the notion that “the qualification of space depends on the body implies that space is determined by something that at times threatens and at times benefits it”;¹¹⁵ this constitutes one of the ways in which space is understood by Lefebvre to be socially produced, and yet paradoxically, the body at once “produces itself in space and it also produces that space.”¹¹⁶ As I have noted, epidemic space is characterised by a territorialised, thanatopolitical regime of spatial governance that adopts a mode of “tropical thinking”, imagining disease to be “proper to a place”; in contrast, endemic space is characterised by deterritorialised dispersal and invisibility of HIV, accommodating of an epidemiological mode of thinking about disease as proper to nodes and practices, of individual actors rather than structural places. In this sense, the delineation between epidemic and endemic space is constituted through the governance by either a thanatopolitical or biopolitical mode.

Biopower: Epidemic/Endemic

In the previous two modulations of the epidemic/endemic imaginary, I demonstrate the delineation of discrete arenas of space and time and their alignment to particular logics. Epidemic time is anachronistic, apocalyptic, and testimonial; it is thus both concerned with contemporaneity and an archival gaze. Epidemic space is

¹¹⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991, p. 174.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.170.

territorialised, governed by tropical thinking, and configured through a thanatopolitical spatial regime of containment. In contrast, endemic time is anachronistic by way of the double-bind of omnipresence and invisibility, characterised by a biopolitics that governs the maintenance of life within a post-apocalyptic discourse, and by a nostalgic backwards-gaze. Endemic space is characterised by deterritorialisation, dispersal, and epidemiological thinking. The third modulation of the epidemic/endemic imaginary turns away from the imagination of bodies in time and space and refocuses on the epidemic/endemic binary within the body itself, the body as a site for biopower's governance. Owing to the role of pharmaceuticals as the catalyst for the transition from epidemic time to endemic time, this formulation of the framework is concerned with the biopolitical aspects that emerge from the lineage of the genealogy of HIV. The endemic era of 'post-AIDS' is typified by newfound reliance on antiretroviral drugs and the attendant pharmacogeocorpographies that this engenders. Utilising an epidemic/endemic framing of the biopolitical concerns of HIV/AIDS recalls Foucault's designation of the emergence of biopolitical epistemologies of public health focusing on endemic issues.¹¹⁷ Just as sovereign power incorporated a biopolitical gaze from the eighteenth century onwards, viewing power as the right to "make live or let die", the transition from AIDS epidemic to endemic HIV reforms the political and economic salience of the seropositive body. The biopolitics of the endemic era, structured by anxieties of containment and a bifurcated temporality of nostalgia and mundanity, are informed by three coetaneous logics. Firstly, HIV in the 'post-AIDS' era is managed through an immunitarian paradigm, whereby the success of HAART in diminishing the potential for the virus to degrade the immune system has mitigated the urgency of developing a 'cure' for HIV. Secondly, the quelling of the immediate threat of AIDS, the establishment of HIV as a chronic condition that can be managed with antiretroviral treatment and the subsequent emergence of seropositive communities has enabled the emergence of new articulations of seropositivity within sexual subcultures, albeit reliant on antiretrovirals; that is, a confluence of chemoprophylaxis, the exploration of 'exotic' sexual practices, including the reclamation of 'pre-AIDS' sexual practices, within an erotic framework. Thirdly, the immunitarian paradigm and emergence of new erotic relations towards antiretrovirals both hinder on the ongoing expansion of the tendrils of marketisation into every sector of life: the neoliberal project. Where the radical

¹¹⁷ Foucault, " *Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976*.

untimeliness of the AIDS crisis, as manifest in epidemic space, interrupted the progress of biomedicine's maintenance and protection of life and emanated in a form of thanatopolitics that appeared to be similarly untimely, the transition into endemic time and the deployment of biopower in endemic space is characterised through its governance by neoliberal biopolitics. In the endemic era, the project of neoliberal biopolitics is illuminated as the capitalisation of "not simply the public sphere and its institutions, but more pertinently the life of the nation;" thus neoliberalism, emerging into praxis coetaneous with the discovery of HIV, "profoundly reconfigures the relationship between debt and life, as institutionalised in the mid-twentieth-century welfare state."¹¹⁸ At the core of this reconfiguration is the production of spaces of neoliberal governance which manifest on the one hand as thanatopolitics and on the other as biopolitics, dependent on the potential for the extraction of value.

In epidemic time, biopower functions as a form of thanatopolitics, the management of inevitable death within populations and the attempts to contain that death within sectors of populations. In contrast, endemic biopolitics are concerned not so much with the maintenance of the death that AIDS brings forth, but of the maintenance of life and its potential for the extraction of value. Thus the afflicted body in epidemic time constitutes a form of 'bare life', excluded from meaningful existence and relegated to death. In endemic time, the afflicted body is a product of an immunitarian logic in which protection of the broader public body is enshrined through its incorporation of negation, manifest in dual terms of viral suppression and the discipline of the self. In this sense, the HIV positive subject is articulated as the "neoliberal sexual actor" in the context of the devolvement of the responsibility of healthcare from the state to the individual.¹¹⁹

The immunitarian paradigm emerges from the work of Roberto Esposito. Expanding and critiquing Foucault's biopolitical analysis of the Nazi regime, Esposito begins with the perpendicular claim that the underlying impulse of Nazism was not death but the preservation of life. Charting the central role of medicine, epidemiology and doctors in every facet of the Nazi regime, Esposito demonstrates that the biopolitics

¹¹⁸ Melinda E Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2008, pp. 9-10.

¹¹⁹ Barry D Adam, 'Constructing the Neoliberal Sexual Actor: Responsibility and Care of the Self in the Discourse of Barebackers', *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2005.

of Nazism can best be understood through an immunitarian logic. The German medical profession were directly involved in every aspect of the Nazi state:

from singling out the babies and then of adults condemned to a ‘merciful’ death in the T4 program, to the extension of what was called ‘euthanasia’ to prisoners of war, to lastly the enormous *therapia magna auschwitzciense*: the selection on the ramp leading into the camp, the start of the process of gassing, the declaration of being deceased, the extraction of gold from the teeth of the cadavers, and supervision of the procedures of cremation. No step in the production of death escaped medical verification.¹²⁰

Yet, as Esposito notes, it was also under the Nazi regime that the first large-scale modern integrated public health campaigns were launched, against cancer, asbestos, tobacco, pesticides, unhealthy food, and carcinogens from X-Rays.¹²¹ This points to the ways in which German doctors at the time may very well have believed they were upholding the tenets of the Hippocratic Oath, “it’s only that they identified the patient as the German people as a whole, rather than as a single individual.”¹²² It is the conceptualisation of immunity that is most prescient to Esposito in his articulation of biopolitics because “it is only immunisation that lays bare the lethal paradox that pushes the protection of life over into its potential negation;”¹²³ that is to say that it is the immunitarian paradigm that transformed the biopolitical endeavours of the Nazi state into the diametric opposite of biopolitics, the use of thanatopolitics in reifying Nazi biopower. It is also the reasoning behind Esposito’s dissatisfaction with Foucault’s articulation of the biopolitics of Nazism as being purely grounded in racism, insofar as racism is not the extent or limit of the Nazi biopolitical philosophy but rather the most salient expression of it. The language of immunity was wholly taken up by the regime and by Hitler himself, who likened the regime’s “discovery of the Jewish virus” to the work of Pasteur and Koch.¹²⁴

Semantically, the concept of immunity, both in antiquity and modernity, constitutes a paradoxical formation of the delineation between Self and Other. From the juridico-political perspective, immunity was, for two thousand years, understood in

¹²⁰ Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. Timothy Campbell, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. 113.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.115.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp.115-6.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.116.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.117.

terms of the privilege of not having to follow the proscribed rules of the community; take for instance the legislated impunity of security forces or the notion of diplomatic immunity that differentiates the rule of law within a jurisdiction based on sovereign allegiance.¹²⁵ The biological conceptualisation of immunity is “a condition of natural or induced refractoriness on the part of a living organism when faced with a given disease.”¹²⁶ Yet for Esposito, both conceptualisations of immunity are fundamentally concerned with the inclusion of the negative in order to sustain the positive. The immunisation paradigm is thus “the intrinsically antinomic mode by which life preserves itself through power ... a negative [form] of the protection of life.”¹²⁷ Vaccination serves as fruitful analogy for Esposito’s articulation that the enigma of biopolitics, which seeks to elucidate the repercussions of the collision of life and power, is flawed in that “no power exists outside of life, just as life is never given outside of relations of power.”¹²⁸ Vaccination obviously involves the inclusion of the negative, in a manner controlled by regimes of biopower, into the body of that which seeks to protect itself from risk of infection. Just as the controlled inclusion of the undesirable bodies were required in Nazi Germany in order for their excision to reaffirm the political control of the community, the controlled application of the feared bacterial/viral threat to the body public must be ritualistically included within the body private in order to preserve life.

In the chemoprophylactic, ‘post-AIDS’ era, the notion of immunity as the incorporation and control of the external threat is most salient. The bifurcation of notions of viral immunity and the subsequent allowances of pleasurable behaviours and risky practices, for example, illustrates not only the ways in which immunisation relates to the incorporation of the threat into the body - in this case, incorporating two-thirds of a standard antiretroviral regimen in order to prevent seroconversion and the likelihood of requiring the whole dose - but also in terms of immunity from the socio-sexual rules and consensus-driven norms of sexual contact in an age of HIV/AIDS. In other words, Esposito’s concept of immunity can be understood in the ability for (mostly rich, mostly white, mostly inner urban) gay men to be prescribed PrEP and for condomless sex to be

¹²⁵ Cohen, 'Immune Communities, Common Immunities', p. 105.

¹²⁶ Esposito, p. 45.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.46.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

tolerated (if not endorsed) whilst many others, particularly the poor and particularly those in poor countries, are treated as forms of bare life, with a seeming disinterest in providing equal or even adequate coverage for affordable antiretrovirals, especially if it might affect the income streams of multinational pharmaceutical corporations. It is immunity that separates bare life from barebackers, those governed by thanatopolitics and those by biopolitics.

The AIDS crisis emerged at the same time as the new economic and political order of neoliberalism was beginning to take hold, and by the time of the transition to the endemic era, the neoliberal “thought-virus”¹²⁹ had become embedded in the public sphere as the dominant political, economic and cultural logic. In the biopolitics of the endemic era, the influence of neoliberal thought is illustrated by the shift from addressing AIDS as a problem of the state to addressing HIV as an individual chronic health concern. The neoliberal rhetoric of individual responsibility underlines the chemoprophylactic push, and the hegemony of free-market ideology reveals its flaws in global HIV/AIDS treatment and the lack of a vaccine. In addition to the construction of the “neoliberal sexual actor”¹³⁰ as locus of individual responsibility, the emergence of neoliberal economic policy coetaneous with the emergence of HIV ensured that the impact of AIDS would be hardest felt in the Global South. As African nations adopted the Structural Adjustment Plans demanded by the Washington Consensus in the 1980s, public sector spending radically declined as finances were directed towards the servicing of growing debt. Garenne and Gakusi note that health expenditure in Zambia decreased by 13.1% per year after 1975, thwarting progress in the development of a robust public health sector capacity.¹³¹ Neoliberalism similarly provides the logic whereby prevention is preferenced over treatment in the Global South whereas treatment is considered to be prevention in the Global North.¹³² The geocorpographic violence enshrined in these perspectives emerge from a reification of marketisation and the pharmaceutical industry’s concession that, unless the price of antiretroviral medication is radically reduced, seropositives in the Global South will not be able to become consumers anyway.

¹²⁹ Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?*, trans. Patrick Camiller, London, Polity, 2000, p. 122.

¹³⁰ Adam.

¹³¹ Michel Garenne and Albert Enéas Gakusi, 'Vulnerability and Resilience: Determinants of Under-Five Mortality Changes in Zambia', *World Development*, vol. 34, no. 10, 2006, p. 1774.

¹³² O'Manique, p. 9.

The delineation between epidemic and endemic biopower is spatio-temporal: the form in which biopower takes is determined by temporality and spatiality. It is useful in this sense to invoke Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, which he defines as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature."¹³³ The epidemic chronotope - that is, epidemic temporality taking place within epidemic space - is thanatopolitical in essence. AIDS-as-crisis is fundamentally concerned with the management of death. In contrast, the endemic chronotope is entirely biopolitical, in that its key concern is the maintenance of life and the ability for the extraction of value from that life. The thanatopolitics of the epidemic and the biopolitics of the endemic emerge as thematic and narrative concerns in HIV/AIDS screen-mediated fiction. As the epidemic chronotope is reimagined in the nostalgic AIDS retrovisions, it is the presence of a thanatopolitical form of governmentality that confronts the 'post-AIDS' audience. Similarly, in AIDS nostalgia films in which concerted efforts have been made to revise and reconstruct narrative elements that might disrupt contemporary neoliberalising processes of either the nation-state or the corporation, the significant neoliberalising shifts in biopolitical approaches to the seropositive body are illuminated. In supranational education-entertainment media, the differences between HIV prevention messaging in the Global North and the Global South demonstrates the ways in which discourses of neoliberal healthcare relate to the biopolitical maintenance of life and commodification of the corporeal. Finally, the subjectivity of the 'barebacker' and the possibility of barebackers as a subversive subcultural formation¹³⁴ is contested through the emergence of a vehemently neoliberal deployment of biopower in the recent intervention of pre-exposure prophylaxis as a viable method of preventing HIV transmission. In the chemoprophylactic era, barebacking can no longer be solely defined through its subversive potential, but rather the barebacker embodies the exemplary immunitary logic through compliance with the neoliberal biopolitical order; these shifts are made ever visible in 'realist' bareback pornography as much as in contemporary gay television.

Biopower in the endemic era thus functions as distinctly neoliberal mode of immunitarian relations, drawing on the biomedical technologies afforded by the

¹³³ Mikhail M Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes towards a Historical Poetics', in Michael Holquist (ed.), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 84.

¹³⁴ As suggested by Dean (2009), McNamara (2013) and Varney (2013).

pharmaceutical industry in order for individual subjects to shield themselves from a viral threat that is assumed to be ubiquitous. I term these new relations to and with chemoprophylactic strategies, and the new affective, sensuous, commercial and identificatory bonds they engender, an 'eRotics of HIV', and elaborate further on this neologism in chapter four.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the ways in which HIV, AIDS and PLHIV have been discursively constructed, represented and mediated through the 'AIDS film' genre during the AIDS crisis, and argued that significant biomedical developments in HIV treatment have produced consequential shifts in the temporality of the lived experience of HIV. In this chapter, I have outlined a conceptual mapping of HIV/AIDS which borrows from the epidemiological lexicon, delineating between the 'epidemic' era of the AIDS crisis and the contemporary 'endemic' era of HIV as a chronic health condition. I have asserted that a temporal disjuncture between the lived realities of HIV and the broader collective cultural image of AIDS demands a more sophisticated contemporary conceptualisation of HIV/AIDS cultural production, and thus have presented a conceptual framework of HIV/AIDS cultural criticism through the sub-conceptual domains of time/temporality, space/territory and the body/biopolitics. I have posited that epidemic temporality can be understood as anachronistic, apocalyptic and testimonial in contrast to endemic temporality which can be understood as anachronistic, post-apocalyptic and nostalgic. At the level of space, I have argued that epidemic space is thanatopolitical and functions through the logic of tropical thinking whereas endemic space is deterritorialised and functions through the logic of epidemiological thinking. At the level of biopower, I have argued that epidemic biopower seeks to manage death and treats afflicted bodies as 'bare life' whereas endemic biopower seeks to extract value from both afflicted and implicated subjects through the deployment of the immunitarian biomedical technology of antiretroviral therapy, and therefore can be understood as a form of neoliberal governance which affords certain corporeal pleasures in exchange for the privatisation of risk. In the following three chapters, I deploy this critical conceptual framework to three diverse generic sites: the AIDS nostalgia film, 'global event' and 'entertainment-education' media, and 'realist' bareback pornography. These genres have been selected because

they account for the bulk of HIV/AIDS fiction on the contemporary screen and, further, exemplify the ways in which the virus is articulated in the endemic era at the level of temporality, territory and biopolitics. Although each of these areas of contemporary HIV/AIDS screen culture are remarkably divergent in terms of production, representation, distribution and reception, the common conceptual framework outlined above enables their distinct mediations of HIV/AIDS to be critically and rigorously examined.

Chapter Two

Forget-Me-Nots: Nostalgic Yearnings for an Epidemic Past

In late September of 2015 Roland Emmerich, the successful disaster movie genre writer and director of films such as *Independence Day* (1996), *The Patriot* (2000) and *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) was unwittingly imbricated in a disaster of his own making as his latest film premiered at the Toronto Film Festival to unanimously scathing reviews from critics and the broader public alike. The film in question was a notable digression from the genre in which he had found considerable success in Hollywood: outside of the studio system, the \$15m feature was largely self-funded by Emmerich's production company Centropolis Entertainment,¹ Emmerich described the project as “a movie that felt personal,” and noted that “not one studio in Hollywood wanted to make the movie.”² His film, *Stonewall*, depicts the events leading up to the

¹ Scott Mendelson, 'Making A 'Stonewall' Film About A White Guy Is Like Making A PG-13 'Expendables 3'', *Forbes*, 10 August 2015, section Media & Entertainment, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2015/08/10/stonewall-whitewashing-controversy-is-bad-for-business/#143a9d7842ed>.

² Emma Jones, 'Roland Emmerich Defends 'Personal' Stonewall Movie', *BBC News*, 24 September 2015, section Entertainment & Arts, <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-34340260>.

Stonewall riots in New York City in June 1969, considered by many to be the beginning of the contemporary gay rights movement. The reaction to the project was already negative months prior to the film's premiere as the early promotional material, including the trailer, were lambasted by critics and on social media for misrepresenting the historical events of Stonewall. In Emmerich's film, the main protagonist is a white, 'straight-acting' gay boy from the Midwest who has fled a homophobic family in his Indiana hometown, migrating to the relative freedom of New York City, where he meets a range of gay, trans and lesbian folks from various walks of life, including the Mattachine Society, the manager of the Mafia-run Stonewall Inn, and the homeless queer youth of Christopher Street. Negative reactions particularly took umbrage with the representation that this white gay male character is depicted as "throwing the first brick" on the night of the riots at the Stonewall Inn. Andrew O'Heir suggested that the depoliticisation of such an inherently political historical narrative was akin to "saying that Rosa Parks was a tired lady who decided she'd rather rest her feet,"³ Alonso Duralde similarly argued that "it's as if Selma had focussed on a fictional white liberal character instead of Martin Luther King, Jr."⁴ On a similar note, Vince Mancini suggested that having the white gay Midwesterner Danny throw the first brick "is a bit like when Marty McFly goes back in time and steals rock'n'roll from Chuck Berry, taking history away from the real participants."⁵ Hannah McLaughlin noted that the film "couldn't be more whitewashed than if it was doused in Clorox Bleach and thrown into the laundry three times over."⁶ The immediate and visceral reaction among queer and trans people on social media over the trailer of a mainstream feature film depicting an important event in the political and cultural history of queer America brings to light the complexities and tensions inherent in attempts to represent shared cultural histories. When historical events of great import serve the basis for fictional narrative storytelling

³ Andrew O'Heir, "'Stonewall' Goes to Sesame Street: This Ludicrous White-Savior Narrative Fails the Historic Uprising on Many Fronts', *Salon*, 23 September 2015, http://www.salon.com/2015/09/22/stonewall_goes_to_sesame_street_this_ludicrous_white_savior_narrative_fails_the_historic_uprising_on_many_fronts/.

⁴ Alonso Duralde, "'Stonewall' Review: Roland Emmerich's Historical LGBT Drama Is the Other Kind of Disaster Movie', *The Wrap*, 23 September 2015, section Movies, <http://www.thewrap.com/stonewall-review-roland-emmerichs-historical-lgbt-drama-is-the-other-kind-of-disaster-movie/>.

⁵ Vince Mancini, "'Stonewall' Is More 'Forrest Gump' Than 'Selma'", *Uproxxx*, 23 September 2015, section Filmdrunk, <http://uproxx.com/filmdrunk/stonewall-movie-review-emmerich/>.

⁶ Hannah McLaughlin, 'Emmerich's Energy Crumbles In 'Stonewall'', *The Heights*, 23 September 2015, section Arts & Review, <http://bcheights.com/2015/09/23/emmerichs-energy-crumbles-in-stonewall/>.

in film, the tenuous links between cultural memories of the past and the cultural and political milieu of the present are revealed. Stonewall was lambasted by movie critics not only for being poorly written and directed but for misrepresenting the political and cultural impetus of this historical moment by ‘whitewashing’ and ‘cis-washing’ the events of the Stonewall riots through the focus on the white gay protagonist when the historical accounts of the events highlight the central role of trans women, queer people of colour and homeless youth in refusing to accept continual police harassment, culminating in two nights of violent street protests at the Stonewall Inn.

The fact that critics and counterpublics have taken umbrage with the accuracy and issues of representation in this film portrayal of queer history in 2015 is telling given the recent emergence of a new genre of the AIDS film. As I highlighted in the previous chapter, the introduction of HAART in the late 1990s and the sudden shift from an epidemic to an endemic temporality of HIV/AIDS that followed in the Global North caused a representational deficit of HIV/AIDS. Whereas HIV/AIDS was fictionally represented in numerous films and television programmes in the 1980s and 1990s, the transition from the visual spectacle of the AIDS crisis to the comparatively banal emergent reality of HIV as a chronic health condition resulted in a cultural invisibility of both HIV and AIDS onscreen. However, the decade of the 2010s has witnessed a renewed interest in culturally mediating HIV/AIDS, beginning with a collection of successful independent documentaries about the AIDS crisis, including *We Were Here* (dir. David Weissman and Bill Weber, 2011, USA), *How To Survive A Plague* (dir. David France, 2012, USA), *Sex Positive* (dir. Daryl Wein, 2008, USA), *United In Anger: A History of ACT UP* (dir. Jim Hubbard, 2012, USA). This was followed by a new genre of AIDS screen-fiction: the AIDS retrovision. Typified by films such as *Les Temoins* (dir. Andre Techine, 2007, France), *The Normal Heart* (dir. Ryan Murphy, 2013, USA), *Dallas Buyers Club* (dir. Jean-Marc Vallee, 2013, USA), *Love For Life* (dir. Gù Chángwèi, 2011, People’s Republic of China), *Test* (dir. Chris Mason Johnson, 2014, USA), *A Home at the End of the World* (dir. Michael Mayer, 2004, USA), *Cazuza - O Tempo Nao Para* (dirs. Walter Carvalho and Sandra Werneck, 2004, Brazil), *I Love You Phillip Morris* (dirs. Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, 2009, USA/France), *Pedro* (dir. Nick Oceano, 2008, USA), *Holding The Man* (dir. Neil Armfield, 2015, Australia) and *120 Battements par Minute* (dir. Robin Campillo, 2017,

France), these films constitute the bulk of screen fiction depicting either HIV or AIDS in the contemporary era.

What these films have in common is the deployment of a nostalgic, retrovisual gaze, reimagining the period of the AIDS crisis years prior to the ‘Protease Moment’ and the ‘end of AIDS’. But just what exactly is at stake when the AIDS past is reinterpreted in the ‘post-AIDS’ present, and how do these retrovisions contribute to a broader (mis)understanding of the history of the AIDS crisis and its contemporary manifestations, including the relative cultural invisibility of issues pertaining to HIV? The emergence of this new genre raises significant questions in regards to the ways in which memories of the AIDS crisis are mobilised and images of the epidemic era are thrust back onto the endemic era screen. This chapter takes account of the generic form of the AIDS retrovision and seeks to identify how the genre situates nostalgic representations of the AIDS crisis years with the contemporary lived realities of seropositivity.

Memory, Nostalgia and Cinema

In the previous chapter, I deconstructed the etymological origins of the term ‘epidemic’ to note its temporal and spatial specificities: from the Greek *epi* and *demios*, the term was borrowed by Hippocrates to refer to diseases proper to a place, drawing on Homer’s use of the term in *The Odyssey* to refer to “those back home” from the perspective of those who have left home. There is striking verisimilitude in the term nostalgia, from the Greek *nostos* (to return home) and *algos* (longing, pain). As historicised by Jean Starobinski, the term was conjured up by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in the seventeenth century to describe the symptoms experienced by those who had endured a prolonged absence from “home”, however it is crucial to note that Hofer’s introduction of the term constituted a break from the concept of “homesickness”, which was already in use at the time; Hofer’s neologism was specifically nosological.⁷ Starobinski goes on to note that through the emergence of this term in medical discourse, these yearnings for a homeland became elevated to the extent that they were broadly considered as fatal. For Starobinski, original nostalgia is

⁷ Jean Starobinski, ‘The Idea of Nostalgia’, *Diogenes*, vol. 14, no. 54, 1966, p. 85.

inherently discursive; nostalgia was a fatal disease transmitted through “conversation.”⁸ Nostalgia was understood, by the end of the eighteenth century, as a fatal disease “throughout all countries of Europe ... all peoples and social classes were vulnerable to it, from the Lapps in Greenland to Negroes serving in slavery.”⁹ However, by the end of the nineteenth century, nostalgia was “banished from the manuals of clinical medicine,” reconfigured from a biological disease to a vague psychiatric condition.¹⁰

Concomitant with the “memory boom” in the humanities and social sciences in the late twentieth century, nostalgia criticism often tended towards denigration of nostalgia as an “invented tradition.”¹¹ Such moralist approaches to nostalgia assert that the nostalgic mode deserves scorn for three key crimes: its tendency to commercialisation, its pervasion of the media, and its mobilisation for the purposes of reactionary politics.¹² As Susannah Radstone evinces, these approaches are “rooted in a realist model of representation that critiques nostalgia for its ‘false’ representation of the past.”¹³ However, as Radstone notes, what is more interesting about the cultural products of nostalgia is not their proximity to an authentic portrayal of history but rather the circumstances in which they appear; the questions which concern “why particular versions of the past emerge when they do” and why particular “modes of representing the past such as the nostalgic mode garner particular appeal at certain times.”¹⁴ These questions are fundamentally important to the present chapter. In analysing the recent corpus of films which deploy a nostalgic gaze to the AIDS crisis I have no desire in repeating the repetitive authenticity debates of critics, academics and journalists alike in arguing that *Schindler’s List* was, by virtue of the conditions of its production and reception, of less cultural value than *Shoah*.¹⁵ To argue that a film such as *The Normal*

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p.95.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.100.

¹¹ Terence O Ranger and Eric J Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1983.

¹² David Lowenthal, ‘Nostalgia Tells it Like it Wasn’t’, in Christopher Shaw and Malcolm Chase (eds), *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1989, pp. 21-2.

¹³ Susannah Radstone, *The Sexual Politics of Time: Confession, Nostalgia, Memory*, New York, Routledge, 2007, p. 114.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ See Hansen (1996) ‘*Schindler’s List* Is Not *Shoah*: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism and Public Memory’, *Critical Inquiry* 22 for a thorough account of the reception of

Heart occupies the bottom end of a continuum of authentic representation with ‘talking heads’ documentaries such as *How to Survive a Plague* at the top, due to their differences in form and the specific histories they recount, does little to account for the more important question: what does the emergence of these popular films at this particular moment in time reveal about contemporary gay politics and contemporary seropositivity? To echo Radstone, why does the AIDS retrovision come to the fore in the present decade, and why is the nostalgic mode of representation so culturally valent for the contemporary audience?

Svetlana Boym argues that the emergence of nostalgia correlates with a point in time in which “the conception of time and history were undergoing radical change.”¹⁶ The nostalgic mode explodes into popular representational discourses in times of social upheaval: the French revolution, the Russian revolution, and the velvet revolutions of Eastern Europe each produced a sense of nostalgic longing. In her innovative account of the “epidemic of nostalgia” that followed the collapse of the Iron Curtain, Boym draws the distinction between two modalities of nostalgia that illuminate not only the “inner space of an individual psyche” but also, and more importantly, the “interrelationship between individual and collective remembrance.”¹⁷ Restorative nostalgia, which is concerned with the *nostos*, “proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps.”¹⁸ Restorative nostalgia lacks an awareness of its emotional condition; focussed on recouping and reconstructing the symbols and institutions of an authentic past, it “does not think of itself as nostalgic” but rather conceives of itself as being loyal to “truth”. Nationalist revivals and conspiracy theories are both exemplars of this form of nostalgia, which “signifies a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment.”¹⁹ The mobilisation of restorative nostalgia is strikingly evident in recent political shifts in the West. Donald Trump’s successful election campaign ostensibly hindered on the promise of returning blue-collar manufacturing jobs to the Midwest rust-belt states and reaffirming a violent and exclusive white American nationalism and masculinity

Schindler’s List and the arguments regarding its proximity within the bounds of the culture industry, its problems with narrative, the “question of cinematic subjectivity” and its issues with cinematic representation.

¹⁶ Boym, p. 8.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.41.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.49.

following Obama's two terms as the first non-white President of the United States of America. Similarly, the successful Brexit campaign for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union parlayed in imagery of an imagined return to a Britain of lower immigration and greater national autonomy. Populist and nationalist leaders and movements across Europe and particularly in the former Eastern Bloc conjure nostalgic visions of the restoration to a former glory in the wake of difficult transitions to capitalism in the 1990s. These tendencies of restorative nostalgia promise that a reduction in global mobilities (of people, ideologies, capital and labour) will enable their respective nations to return to an imagined golden age defined by cultural homogeneity, with a revived emphasis on defining the characteristics of their respective national identities. In contrast, reflective nostalgia emphasises the *algia*, the sense of yearning and longing. For Boym, reflective nostalgia is concerned not so much with the impossible task of rebuilding "the mythical place called home"²⁰ but with individual and collective memories of "a home that no longer exists or has never existed"²¹ in this sense, Boym's account of the post-socialist condition, drawing heavily on her own subjective experiences of loss, longing and displacement, dwells in the reflexivity of this second mode. For Boym, restorative nostalgia "ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialise time", whereas, in contrast, reflective nostalgia "cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalises space."²² Rather than attempting to reconstruct home, the reflective mode of nostalgia revels in the inconsistencies, ironies and fragmented memories of the home that "is in ruins, or, on the contrary, has been just renovated and gentrified beyond recognition."²³

Crucially, the reflective nostalgic mode, through its dwelling in *algia* and embrace of the fragmentary, serves as an affective structure for forms of collective memory grounded in familial trauma and loss. In her work with second-generation writers and visual artists producing works informed by their familial experiences of the Holocaust, Marianne Hirsch uses the term 'postmemory' to describe the particular memory practices of children of the survivors of trauma. Whilst these

²⁰ Ibid., p.50.

²¹ Svetlana Boym, 'Nostalgia and its Discontents', *Hedgehog Review*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2007, p. 7.

²² Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 49.

²³ Ibid., p.50.

memory practices do not relate to directly lived experiences of the subjects, Hirsch argues that they “are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right.”²⁴ The ‘post’ in postmemory “signals more than a temporal delay and more than a location in an aftermath”, but rather, a “structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience.”²⁵ Whilst Hirsch is focussed on memory practices situated around the Holocaust, and how these memory practices are transmitted specifically through familial ties, the intergenerational dislocation of historical experience from lived memory practices that constitute postmemory are acutely relevant to postmemory practices of the AIDS crisis. Just as the dislocated and fragmented memory practices of second and third generations share the collective experience of the trauma and loss of the Holocaust through the intergenerational transmission of memory, the collective practices of AIDS remembrance emerging in recent years are often removed from autobiographical experience. In efforts to memorialise and in efforts to unpack the complicated ways in which traumatic cultural histories permeate into the present, affected communities engage in collective memory practices through storytelling, archival work and cultural production. Yet the ways in which these memories are crystallised in the present reveals not only the importance of these historical narratives to contemporary social, political and cultural processes but also demonstrates how contemporary politics and cultural tendencies are synchronously mapped onto purported historical truths in order to serve social, political and cultural interests in the present.

Calls for the productive use of collective memory practices are not limited to demands to remember, but can also engage demands to forget, or, more precisely, to stop remembering. Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed chart the concerted calls by prominent gay neoconservative writers such as Gabriel Rotello, Michelangelo Signorile and Andrew Sullivan for gay culture to install a form of prophylactic cultural amnesia in response to the AIDS crisis. Such calls are characterised by Castiglia and Reed as “de-generational unremembering.”²⁶ The process is ‘de-generational’ in the sense that it demands a disconnection and temporal dislocation between the generation

²⁴ Marianne Hirsch, 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2001, p. 9.

²⁵ Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory', *Poetics Today*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2008, p. 106.

²⁶ Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed, *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of the Queer Past*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

of gay men who lived before and during the AIDS crisis and the generation of gay men who grew in its wake; a severing of the transgenerational bonds which serve as a conduit for the transmission of generational memories and revolutionary histories. Castiglia and Reed use the term ‘unremembering’ to emphasise that “the act of distancing the past is a perpetual process” which requires “perpetual self-monitoring for inclinations to pastness.”²⁷ Central to their claim is that gay neoconservative calls for willed amnesia following the AIDS epidemic constituted a “discursive operation” that encouraged a “cultural forgetting” of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, “installing instead a cleaned-up memory that reconstitutes sanctioned identity out of historical violence.”²⁸ This concerted assault on gay memory, under the guise of a prophylactic amnesia, reconfigured gay cultural consciousness along the lines of health and respectability and interpellated a new gay subjectivity that conceptualised the period of gay history between Stonewall and the AIDS crisis in terms of sexual irresponsibility. In the interests of the wellbeing and future prosperity of gay men, so the pundits argued, the forms of gay sexual culture which existed prior to and during the AIDS crisis must be disavowed and replaced with a ‘healthy’ subjectivity ripe to claim the rewards that respectable middle-class normativity offers. Crucially, such a call for progressing beyond collective trauma and non-monogamous, non-procreative sexual practices does not merely produce temporal isolation within gay communities and reconfigure gay political claims towards a “politics of inclusion,”²⁹ but moreover it attempts to paint over the ways in which inventive, non-normative and unsanctioned sexual cultures were productive of cultural knowledge and communitarian care and kinship structures. Indeed, as demonstrated by the relative success of the Australian approach, these inventive and non-normative sexual cultures created the first epistemologies of safer sex; further, the promiscuity and non-monogamy that was common in gay male sexual culture enabled the collective community response to the AIDS crisis when homophobic stigma ensured that support from the mainstream public was lacking.

²⁷ Ibid., p.10.

²⁸ Ibid., p.40.

²⁹ Michael Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

A furtive site for the cultural production of nostalgia can be found in the cinema. For Fredric Jameson, the “depthlessness” inherent to postmodernism, as the dominant “cultural logic” of late capitalism, is exemplified in what he describes as the pastiche-driven “nostalgia film.”³⁰ Jameson warns that this “mesmerising new aesthetic mode” is in fact an “elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way” and points to the “enormity of a situation in which we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience.”³¹ There is a certain resonance in the argument that the nostalgia film is a product of the end of history; indeed, the ‘end of AIDS’ and the transition from epidemic to endemic temporality is productive of the temporal disjuncture which predicated the AIDS retrovision. Whilst Jameson’s critique of *American Graffiti* is most commonly cited as the first cultural critique of the nostalgia film, Christine Sprengler rightly notes that it was in fact preceded by an account of the modalities of the nostalgia film by Marc Le Sueur in 1977. Sprengler advocates for the return of Le Sueur’s theory of nostalgia to film studies not only owing to its predation of the canonical texts on nostalgia (from Jameson, Boym and Grainge) but also for its introduction of the term “deliberate archaism,” which Sprengler goes on to mobilise in her account of the use of surface realism, nostalgic aestheticism and “populuxe props” in nostalgia films.³² Le Sueur’s account of the nostalgia film is far more forgiving and reparative than Jameson’s, and, similarly to Boym decades later, he characterises two forms of nostalgia: restorative (which maps onto Boym’s definition of the same) and melancholic, which loosely aligns with Boym’s definition of reflective nostalgia. Le Sueur suggests that the melancholic mode is most often employed by Hollywood, and is characterised by its “essentially uncritical methodology [that] ... often creates a body of semi-truths.”³³ However, Le Sueur notes that this mode of the nostalgic filmic gaze “possesses ... an aesthetic consistency which continually strikes a responsive nerve

³⁰ Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review*, no. 146, 1984.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.68.

³² Christine Sprengler, *Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe Props and Technicolor Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film*, New York and Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2009.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.84.

within the audience” and is thus “the product of a very real need in most of us, one that entails a certain amount of self deception.”³⁴

In reevaluating Le Sueur’s theorisation, Sprengler is able to ameliorate the Jamesonian tendency to view the nostalgia film’s propensity to artifice as evidence that the nostalgia film is operating purely within a postmodern frame of unhistoricity. Drawing on Le Sueur’s two concepts of ‘surface realism’ and ‘deliberate archaism,’ Sprengler is able to map a trajectory for reading these aesthetic signifiers as more than just an articulation of gauche ‘50s-ness’ as suggested by Jameson but rather that the visual “can be put to creative uses that initiate engagements with history, nostalgia and the uses of the past in the present.”³⁵ Aesthetics, then, are to be understood not merely in the Jamesonian sense as pastiche and not merely as unwelcome yet tolerated necessary evils concomitant with the popularisation of historical narratives through the culture industry but rather as crucial elements which engender the melancholy and reflexivity of immersive and imaginative identification with and through these texts. In this sense, the subjectivity of melancholic public remembrance is inherently modern. Alison Landsberg introduces the term ‘prosthetic memory’ to account for the ways in which the cinema and other forms of experiential media have reshaped public cultural memory in modernity by virtue of their formal and aesthetic potential.³⁶ For Landsberg, the commodification of remembrance through “new mass cultural technologies” which enable affective and emotional responses with the representation of histories that the subject did not experience organically should not be disregarded or discounted on the grounds of a lack of authenticity. Rather, Landsberg suggests that “a sensuous engagement with the past ... becomes the basis for mediated collective identification and the production of potentially counterhegemonic public spheres.”³⁷ Although these memories are not ‘natural’ or ‘authentic’, Landsberg argues, they “organise and energise the bodies and subjectivities that take them on.”³⁸ Central to Landsberg’s claim is that the sensuous, experiential potential enabled by the emergence of new

³⁴ Marc Le Sueur, 'Theory Number Five: Anatomy of Nostalgia Films', *Journal of Popular Film*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1977, p. 196.

³⁵ Sprengler, p. 90.

³⁶ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.26.

technologies of representation in the culture industry - the recreation of the image of a San Francisco dance company in the 1980s in *Test*, the retro deployment of the 1980s HBO screen titles in *The Normal Heart*, the sensuous tactility of the Sony Walkman and the diegetic use of popular music of the time - in short, the superficial elements of the historical film which are derided by Jameson as artifice are in fact crucial for the production of a deeply personal and connected response to collective memory.

The theoretical approaches to memory, nostalgia and cinema that I have outlined above demonstrate the contentiousness of debates on the uses and abuses of public memory. Taking the epistemology of nostalgia into account, this chapter elucidates how recent AIDS films adopting the nostalgic gaze engage with time, space and biopolitics in ways that are productive for contemporary HIV- and gay politics, demonstrating how certain representations of AIDS histories are mobilised not only for the purposes of remembrance at an individual level but also in the service of neoliberal discourses of health, illness and sexual citizenship.

This chapter presents analyses of recent cinematic portrayals of the AIDS crisis which constitute exemplars of two divergent nostalgic modes of historical mediation. The first mode correlates with Boym's articulation of restorative nostalgia. The restorative mode can be understood as an opposing or correcting force against the inconsistencies and fragmented individual and cultural memories that are invoked by the reflective mode, and is utilised by hegemonic powers to solidify national or ideological myths of the past that serve to reify existing hegemonic structures in the present. As such, this section considers two mainstream AIDS retrovision films from different national cinemas and cultural contexts that nonetheless both serve to reify the same particular political and economic imperative. In both *Dallas Buyers' Club* (dir. Jean-Marc Vallée, United States, 2014) and *Love for Life* (dir. Gù Chángwèi, People's Republic of China, 2011) we return not to the beginning of the crisis in their respective locales, but to flashpoints that serve as the backdrop for a superimposed ideological narrative. Addressing the many similarities in these films, in this section I illustrate the ways in which historical narratives of AIDS are mobilised in the service of contemporary political and ideological agendas through the artifice of nostalgia. Crucially, these films mobilise historical public cultural memories of the AIDS crisis that appear to contradict the prevailing Western cultural narratives of AIDS

historiography. They are wholly productive of biopolitical and economic discourses which reify contemporary neoliberal ideologies of health, kinship and personal responsibility, and the work they do at the level of ideology is shown to be remarkably clear.

The second nostalgic mode accounted for in this chapter is, in contrast, conceptually slippery. The two films I analyse in this section dip into what Boym characterises as reflective nostalgia and what Le Seuer regards as melancholy - their relationship to collective memory evinces the reflective nostalgic tendency toward the embrace of fragmentation and reliance on aesthetics to produce an affective attachment in the viewer - however they too are productive a particular mode of contemporary neoliberal sexual citizenship. They also mobilise nostalgic affect in a way that differs remarkably from the first two films. In both *Test* (dir. Chris Mason Johnson, United States, 2013) and *The Normal Heart* (dir. Ryan Murphy, United States, 2014), a sensuous nostalgic affect is mobilised through the careful deployment of retro aesthetics, demonstrating Sprengler's assertion that visual nostalgic signifiers are more than just gauche indicators of 'eighties-ness' but can be mobilised to interpellate an audience into a subject position that engenders the affective processes of prosthetic memory. Notwithstanding the value of these films in lingering in the fragmented public cultural memories of the AIDS crisis in gay communities in North America during the 1980s and the residual prosthetic memories of later generations of gay communities who have no adult lived experience of the crisis years, these films similarly evince a tendency to modulate AIDS histories through their narratives and engage in what Castiglia and Reed describe as de-generational un-remembering by sanctioning a normalising (retro)vision. Discursively, these films produce historical accounts which apportion blame on the ravages of the AIDS crisis on the inventive sexual cultures that existed prior to and during the crisis, promoting a retrovisual reading of the crisis through the lens of homonormative respectability and the politics of inclusion.

The emergence and apparent endurance of the AIDS retrovision as a sub-genre of the HIV/AIDS film demonstrates the ways in which endemic time is constituted through anachronism and nostalgia. As this genre makes evident, the inability to cinematically represent HIV in the 'post-AIDS' era reduces its cultural valence to an event that occurred in the past or which occurs 'elsewhere'.

Restorative Retrovisions

It is telling that despite a large corpus of AIDS retrovisions which draw on the reflective mode of nostalgia to explore structures of feeling during the AIDS crisis and engender embodied and affective responses to shared cultural memory, by far the most commercially successful film of the AIDS retrovision genre recasts the past in order to restore the reputation of American heterosexual masculinity. Furthermore, its narrative resituates histories of PWA-centred medical activism within the locus of contemporary political debates about the provision of healthcare in the United States and the role of the state in delivering public health outcomes. *Dallas Buyers Club* is based on the story of Ron Woodruff, a Texan man who initiated one of many ‘buyers’ clubs’ in the United States in the 1980s, PWA-led clandestine groups who circumvented federal laws to import experimental AIDS medications into the United States from other countries. *Dallas Buyers Club* is the most commercially successful film about HIV/AIDS since *Philadelphia* in 1993, earning US\$55.2m at the box office and receiving multiple Oscar, Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild nominations and awards.³⁹ As the most significant Hollywood film concerning HIV/AIDS this century, the film’s designation as an AIDS retrovision is pertinent in contextualising the genre as the primary optic for viewing HIV/AIDS in contemporary culture; that is, the retrovisual optic. Furthermore, in the context of contemporary debates about access to antiretrovirals for prophylaxis and the state’s role in the provision of healthcare in the United States, the film’s emphasis on the individual as neoliberal hero in a bureaucratic dystopia of government overreach and inaction points to its designation as a restorative AIDS retrovision.

Similarly, the only mainstream mainland Chinese film to address the topic of HIV/AIDS adopts the nostalgic mode whilst narratively recasting the points of contention surrounding the history of the Chinese AIDS crisis in the 1990s. Gù Chángwèi, one of the famed ‘fifth generation’ who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in 1982, subsequently worked as a cinematographer on some of the most

³⁹ BoxOfficeMojo, *Dallas Buyers Club*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=main&id=dallasbuyersclub.htm>, 2017, (accessed 18 March).

notable films of the period, frequently working alongside directors Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige.⁴⁰ Gu's 2011 film *Love for Life* (released in China as 最爱, *Zuì ài*) features two of the most popular screen actors in Sinophone cinema, Zhāng Zǐyí (one of the Four Dan Actresses of mainland Chinese cinema) and Aaron Kwok (one of the Four Heavenly Kings of Hong Kong cantopop and cinema) as lead romantic counterparts. In the film, a rural village is impacted by the plasma economy crisis of the 1990s, and many villagers fall ill with AIDS. Lao Zhuzhu, the father of the blood bank entrepreneur Zhao Qiquan who was responsible for infecting the villagers, sets up an AIDS quarantine camp in the disused school outside the village where the infected villagers live (and die) together, sequestered from the main population of the village. Whilst in the compound, Qinqin (Zhāng Zǐyí) and Deyi (Aaron Kwok), who have both been rejected by their spouses, develop a romantic relationship, culminating in their eventual divorces and marriage together. In the final scene, Qinqin sacrifices herself for Deyi, who is burning up with a fever, by immersing herself in an icy bath so that Deyi may hold her in his arms to cool down; the next morning, Deyi awakes to see Qinqin's lifeless body on the floor. As the first (and thus far, only) government-endorsed mainland Chinese narrative film to address HIV/AIDS, *Love for Life* carries significant weight in terms of the official narrative of the AIDS crisis in China in the 1990s, which was the product of the combination of economic reforms and state capitalism in China. In Hénán province, the provincial government headed a campaign for plasmapheresis, a process whereby blood is taken from a donor, processed in a centrifuge to extract the plasma, while remaining blood elements such as red blood cells are returned to the donor. Blood plasma is then sold to pharmaceutical companies to make blood-based products. In underresourced rural areas of Hénán province where citizens had few economic opportunities, they had little to sell but their blood itself. However, due to lax regulation, poor oversight, a lack of training and an impetus to make profits, the campaign resulted in an estimated 40% of the 3 million donors contracting HIV through improper sterilisation procedures. In *Love for Life*, the blame is cast solely on Zhao Qiquan who is represented as a callous and evil businessman, and the involvement of the state and the pharmaceutical industry itself in producing the conditions that allowed

⁴⁰ Yingjin Zhang, *Gu Changwei*, in *Encyclopedia Of Chinese Film*, edited by Yingjin Zhang and Zhiwei Xiao, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 181..

for so many HIV infections - not to mention the denial of the crisis' existence and the state's failure to provide treatment to PWAs - is obviously ignored.

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym describes restorative nostalgia as that which “puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps.”⁴¹ For Boym, this modality of nostalgia dwells in “invented traditions” and “characterises national and nationalist revivals all over the world.” In contrast to reflective nostalgia, which is grounded in the imperfections of remembrance and the reflexivity of feelings of longing and loss, restorative nostalgia is driven not by “the sentiment of distance and longing but rather the anxiety about those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present and thus question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition.”⁴² Restorative nostalgics don't conceptualise of themselves as nostalgic at all, rather they view their project as the rational return to clearly articulated historical moment. Whereas reflective nostalgia is concerned with the liminal space between individual and collective memory, restorative nostalgia “evokes national past and future,” and whilst the two forms of nostalgia “may overlap in their frames of reference,” Boym notes that their difference lies in “their narratives and plots of identity.”⁴³ In the case of both *Dallas Buyers Club* and *Love for Life*, the nostalgic tendency is deployed not in the interest of exploring the affective tensions between individual and collective memory or to reflexively engage with feelings of loss or longing, but in the interest of restoring the innocence of hegemonic institutions in their historical failings in the AIDS crisis. In *Dallas Buyers Club*, the contemporary politics of healthcare provision and the role of the individual are addressed whilst the reputation of heterosexual masculinity is exonerated. In *Love for Life*, the role of the state and of state capitalism in causing the Chinese AIDS crisis of the 1990s are distracted by the construction of the evil individual entrepreneur. In both, it is the restorative nostalgic mode that is invoked in order to construct histories of the AIDS crisis that are palatable to contemporary hegemonies.

The restorative AIDS retrovisions outlined here engage the nostalgic optic to problematise the depiction of the AIDS past in temporal, spatial and biopolitical ways.

⁴¹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 41.

⁴² Ibid., pp.44-5.

⁴³ Ibid., p.49.

At the level of temporality, the films sanction their accounts through the prism of being ‘based on a true story’, sanctioning their retrovisions through a reach towards historical authenticity. Spatially, they invoke notions of segregation and mobility. In terms of biopolitics, they challenge contemporary regimes of healthcare provision and government intervention.

Temporality in Restorative Retrovisions

By situating their narratives in the context of “true stories” both *Dallas Buyers Club* and *Love for Life* reach for historical authenticity. Whilst these films emerge from vastly different political contexts - *Dallas Buyers Club* is a libertarian response to debates concerning the Affordable Healthcare Act in the United States and the valorisation of the individual, whereas *Love for Life* was government censor-endorsed account of the history of the plasma crisis in relation to individual greed - they both mobilise historical memory in the service of contemporary political endeavours in relation to HIV and healthcare. Further, they reconfigure historical culpability for the impact of the AIDS crisis in their respective locales. *Dallas Buyers Club* invokes the trope of the American cowboy in order to rearticulate the history of the AIDS crisis and early grassroots medical interventions in a way that rescues American heteromascularity and the legacy of the Reagan administration. *Love for Life* identifies the individual greed of blood merchants, rather than the liberalising economic reforms of the time, as the key antagonist, and recreates the experience of communal living in the Maoist era to demonstrate its flaws.

Love for Life is based on Yán Liánkē’s 2006 novel, *Dīng zhuāng mèng* (丁庄梦 *The Dream of Ding Village*), published as a fictional novel but the result of three years of research into the plasma economy scandal in China’s rural and impoverished Hénán province in the 1990s. Chien-hsin Tsai characterises Yan’s work as “the writing of autoimmunity,”⁴⁴ in the sense that both state censorship in China and Yan’s own anticipatory self-censorship illustrate what Michael Holquist refers to as the “paradox of censorship,” an immunitarian logic “where attempts at self-protection quickly turn

⁴⁴ Chien-hsin Tsai, ‘In Sickness or in Health: Yan Lianke and the Writing of Autoimmunity’, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2011, p. 78.

inward and become counterproductive.”⁴⁵ In the case of *The Dream of Ding Village*, Yán’s self-censorship unleashed such a paradox; the book was banned from distribution, sale and promotion in the PRC by the authorities despite Yán’s anticipatory redactions.⁴⁶ Subsequently, the ban generated further interest about the book, both in mainland China and overseas, enhancing its profile and garnering translations in French (2006), German (2009), Danish (2011), English (2011), Norwegian (2012) and Korean (2013). Thus, Yán’s “writing of autoimmunity” in which he self-censored his work to reduce the focus on the structural economic and governmental reasons for the impact of the AIDS crisis in China in order to protect itself against government censorship instead functioned as a self-defeating measure; similarly, the government’s attempt at self-protection by censoring critical or controversial cultural products inevitably backfires as citizens are increasingly able to access banned materials online, with the news of censorship acting as free advertising. In this context, the production background of *Love for Life* is particularly exegetic of the modalities of AIDS nostalgia the film enlists.

Love for Life is the first mainstream mainland Chinese feature film to significantly address China’s blood-selling AIDS epidemic in the 1990s and was produced with significant involvement of the Chinese government.⁴⁷ The opening sequence in *Love for Life* introduces us to the 12-year old narrator, Xiao Xin, whose voiceover situates the film in a small mountain village called Goddess Temple. Xiao Xin is the son of the blood merchant Qiquan and has died from “the fever,” and watches over Goddess Temple, providing narration and context to the film’s narrative. However, as a child, Xiao Xin’s innocence and *naïveté* also function as a form of unreliable narration. This unreliable narration is further represented by the opening titles, which Zuo argues constitutes a “disavowal of historical context” as a title appears which temporally locates the narrative as being “set during the early 1990s” and is

⁴⁵ As cited in *ibid.*

⁴⁶ In an interview with *The Guardian*, Yan laments his decision: “This is not the book I originally wanted to write ... I censored myself very rigorously. I didn’t mention senior leaders. I reduced the scale. I thought my self-censorship was perfect ... my greatest worry is that self-censorship has drained my passion and dulled my sharpness.” (in Watts 2006, n.p.).

⁴⁷ Zuo notes that the film was “made with the participation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), funded by the Ministry of Health and produced by Beijing Forbidden City Film Company,” a state-owned film production company (2015, p.210).

immediately followed with a note that “the story is purely fictional.”⁴⁸ By first articulating and then immediately disavowing the historical context of the film, Zuo argues that the film exhibits “duelling impulses towards authenticity *and* fiction.”⁴⁹ The line between representing the authentic story of the impact of the AIDS crisis in Hénán province through an affective and melodramatic narrative which seeks to empathise with seropositive villagers and the government’s impulse to enact an immunitarian form of protection against a narrative that reflects poorly on the state is also evident in the production background of the film. Zuo argues that “the state’s investment in the film ensured that the problematic aspects of Yan’s banned novel that implicated local governments in the contaminated blood economy would not make it onscreen.”⁵⁰ In particular, in *Love for Life* the blame for the crisis is personified by the bloodhead Qiquan, who is represented in the film as an unscrupulous and unethical entrepreneur. The only scene that comes close to visualising the blood donation process that infected the villagers comes in the form of a brief black and white montage in which Qiquan is “conducting his lone crude enterprise with steel collection buckets and a broken, dirty megaphone.”⁵¹

By singling out Qiquan, as representative of the corrupt individual entrepreneurs taking advantage of misinformed peasants, the government is exonerating itself. Shao Jing argues that “in the moral economy of blame,” various actors have been identified as culprits, with the government identifying as villains the “‘blood heads’ who acted as human agents for the spread of the virus: they recruited donors, bussed them from one collection station to another, and brought illegal plasma harvesting into the villages.”⁵² The figure of the bloodhead becomes a convenient scapegoat for the government in two key ways. Firstly, it conceals the structural, economic and governmental pressures that produced an environment in which the crisis could occur. Kathleen Erwin notes that the imperative for commercial blood collection was a result of the market liberalisation in the Dèng Xiǎopíng era, as increasing privatisation in the Chinese economy decimated local and provincial health budgets, particularly in inland provinces “as the central

⁴⁸ Mila Zuo, ‘Bodies, Blood, and Love: The Touching Politics Of HIV/AIDS Film “Love For Life”’, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2015, p. 208.

⁴⁹ Ibid., emphasis in original.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.210.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Shao, p. 554.

government poured resources into urban coastal areas to build infrastructure and attract development.”⁵³ As rural peasants were incentivised to join the push for agricultural decollectivisation in favour of embodying the entrepreneurial zeitgeist in the early period of reform from 1979 to 1984, the proceeding decade presented increasing economic challenges for both rural households and provincial governments as costs began to rise and agricultural income stagnated.⁵⁴

Dallas Buyers Club similarly situates itself *vis-à-vis* its proximity to authenticity in retelling the story of Ron Woodruff, a Texan man living with AIDS who started a Buyers Club for AIDS patients in Dallas in the early 1980s. The film is heavily critical of the role of the state in the AIDS crisis and in the provision of healthcare, and adopts the motif of the American cowboy in order to present a narrative in which Woodruff is pitted against a behemoth of government and health sector regulations preventing him from accessing experimental and unapproved AIDS medications for personal use. It similarly seeks to redemption, however unlike *Love for Life*, which aims to redeem the Chinese government from misdeeds during the 1990s, *Dallas Buyers Club* seeks to redeem American heteromascularity by demonstrating that a straight man imbued with all of the trappings of machismo that the figure of the renegade cowboy implies was a saviour and not a threat. Further, its criticism of the Food and Drug Administration’s regulations sanctions a *laissez faire* approach to the provision of healthcare which is in tune with contemporary debates in the United States about the role of the state in healthcare.

Through all of this, the filmmakers are recasting the history of AIDS treatment activism on two fronts by choosing to emphasise elements of this “based on a true story” history that are commensurate with a distinctly libertarian political ideology. By constructing Woodruff’s character as a homophobic exemplar of Texan frontier heterosexual masculinity when Woodruff was in fact reported by his former friends to have been bisexual and certainly not homophobic, nor involved in the rodeo, and by continually emphasising Woodruff’s heterosexuality, homophobia and masculinity to an almost-nauseating extent, the filmmakers are reconstructing the history of the AIDS

⁵³ Kathleen Erwin, 'The Circulatory System: Blood Procurement, AIDS, and the Social Body in China', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2006, p. 147.

⁵⁴ Ann S Anagnost, 'Strange Circulations: The Blood Economy in Rural China', *Economy and Society*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2006, p. 514.

crisis in the United States. In this reconstruction, the role of homophobia and hegemonic masculinity in first ignoring, and then exacerbating the impact of the AIDS crisis through its association with gay men is conveniently exonerated as the cowboy saviour AIDS patient is himself constitutive of the identity position taken to be the problem. As the narrative goes, were it not for the renegade cowboy attitude of Woodruff who sacrificed himself in a noble battle against a corrupt bureaucracy and overbearing regulation of the nanny state, the pathetic homosexuals, hookers and heroin junkies of Texas would have been left to earlier graves at the hands of the FDA and the health system; the misdeeds of heteromascularity throughout the AIDS crisis years are thus redeemed by Ron Woodruff. Similarly, in the context of the battle over the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* (colloquially known as ObamaCare) which dominated President Obama's first term in office, the film's mobilisation of libertarian arguments about government regulation and the FDA's perceived blockading of effective but unapproved treatments whilst ignoring both the political and structural impediments to improving access on the one hand and the communitarian, grassroots and community-led treatment action movements which typified the nature of buyers' clubs across the United States during this period. Instead, we are left with a cowboy narrative which emphasises values consistent with extreme free-market ideology, American individualism, vampiric entrepreneurialism and cowboy capitalism. It is no surprise, then, that *Dallas Buyers Club* received an accolade of glowing reviews from libertarian institutions such as the Cato Institute,⁵⁵ making it one of the only AIDS films to garner positive responses from both sides of the political spectrum, if not the only AIDS film to garner much sympathetic interest at all from the conservative right. What is immensely disturbing is that this particular AIDS retrovision, though its restorative nostalgia which exonerates heteromascularity and free-market ideology from their respective roles in the AIDS crisis, is by far the most successful commercial film about the AIDS crisis since Jonathan Demme's 1993 *Philadelphia*, and has been largely successful in reshaping the cultural history of the AIDS crisis in America.

Space in Restorative Retrovisions

⁵⁵ David Boaz, 'Dallas Buyers Club is a Terrific Libertarian Movie', *Cato At Liberty*, 12 November 2013, <https://www.cato.org/blog/dallas-buyers-club-terrific-libertarian-movie>.

The tensions between the era of state-socialism and the post-reform era of neoliberal risk is explored through spatialisation in *Love for Life*. Zuo suggests that the disconnect between the urban viewing environment of city movie theatres and the impoverished rural setting of the film constitutes a “cinesthetic commute” which “perceptually closes the gap between co-temporaneous manifestations of Chinese modernity,”⁵⁶ however it also allows for a critical commentary on the virtues and pitfalls of both the socialist and post-socialist eras in China, and in particular the ways in which the different modalities of these eras are enacted upon rural Chinese communities. In repentance for his bloodhead son’s misdeeds, Lao Zhu, the former schoolmaster, offers to use the abandoned schoolhouse on a hill outside the village to care for the seropositive villagers who have themselves been abandoned by their families. Exiled and isolated from the rest of the community and without the ability to work, the residents of this AIDS compound agree to pool their resources and food together in a form of recollectivisation which harkens back to the era of state-socialism. Whilst this communal living situation is shown to be beneficial for the exiles at the beginning, as they cook, eat, clean and sleep together in the compound, any semblance of idealism is soon shattered by the harsh realities of the neoliberal habitus that has come to define the post-socialist era in China. Zuo notes that the sick villagers, “abjectly treated as contaminated bodies and living corpses ... are forced to recreate, without nostalgia of ideological incentive, the manners of Chinese livelihood during its 20th century socialist experiments,” rendering the abandoned schoolhouse “a synecdoche for the rural Chinese village, caught between traditional agrarian society and urban modernisation.”⁵⁷ Within the confines of the schoolhouse, the exiles are shown to “both recreate and resist the motions of an anachronistic socialist life.”⁵⁸

It is within the heterotopic space of the schoolhouse that the values of both socialist and neoliberal life are interrogated in the film. Returning to the overarching frame of AIDS as a disease of capitalism, the villagers’ state-sponsored acculturation of market values in becoming “desiring subjects”⁵⁹ is rendered as both the reason for their

⁵⁶ Zuo, p. 209.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp.218-219.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2007.

infection and the reason for the demise of their collectivist compound. Individual material desires amongst the sick villagers leads to various items being stolen, including Qinqin's red silk jacket. Zuo finds links between the Chinese government's reform mantra that "some must get rich first" and the resident cook Liang Fang's appeal to her fellow exiles after being caught having stolen a bag of communal rice, as she argues that she works harder than the other exiles and if she had been out of the compound she would have been paid in money as well as in rice for her deeds.⁶⁰ Finally, the compound dissolves when two men from the village sell all of the school's property and the exiles have to return home to their families. Having been rejected by their respective families, and rejected by the village, Qinqin and Deyi move into a crumbling stone shack on the edge of the village where they see out the last of their days, culminating the scene in which Qinqin sacrifices herself for Deyi's health.

Similar spatialisations are at play in *Dallas Buyers Club*. Woodruff's characterisation as a rodeo cowboy and a free agent in the urban setting of Dallas is frequently juxtaposed with his containment within institutional spaces, particularly once he recognises and comes to terms with this terminal diagnosis. However, Woodruff is able to break free from this foreboding containment in his heroic role as a drug smuggler, crossing social as well as geopolitical borders throughout his journey to queer spaces of the city and later to international locations to purchase experimental AIDS medications. This begins with Woodruff travelling to a border town in northern Mexico where he meets a doctor who was banned from practicing medicine in the United States and who has been experimenting with various therapeutic treatments for people living with AIDS. After spending some time in his clinic, Woodruff plans to smuggle Peptide T into the United States, dressing as a Catholic priest and only just managing to evade border controls through his ingenuity and wit. Later, a montage scene shows Woodruff travelling to the Netherlands, Israel and China in order to obtain medications.

Biopolitics in Restorative Retrovisions

In terms of the biopolitics of HIV/AIDS, both *Dallas Buyers Club* and *Love for Life* affirm that it is the individual who needs to be responsible for the direction of healthcare provision and not the state. In doing so, the inaction of both the Reagan

⁶⁰ Zuo, p. 219.

administration in the United States in the 1980s and the national and provincial governments in China in the 1990s are not emphasised as being culpable for the damages of the AIDS crisis. In *The Wild West: The Mythical Cowboy and Social Theory*, Will Wright illustrates the centrality of the cowboy myth to the mythology of the United States, and in particular the values of “liberty” which inform free market ideology. The cowboy, Wright suggests,

is the symbol of market individualism in America and around the world. He represents freedom and equality, but he also represents the idea that market freedom and equality can lead to a good society, a civil society. The cowboy, then, also represents a commitment to honour and decency, a commitment to honesty and trust. He emerges from the wilderness to create market society, and his vision of civility is defined by an open frontier.⁶¹

In *Dallas Buyers Club*, Woodruff is represented as a lone cowboy, battling and evading the corrupt bureaucracies of medicine and government. After being diagnosed with AIDS and given 30 days to live, Woodruff engages with three distinct sites to try and find a solution to his condition: researching at the library; returning to the hospital to speak with an AIDS specialist to demand medications; and attending an AIDS support network meeting. As his independent research leads him to the hospital where the bureaucracy of the health system ultimately rejects his demands for trial medication, and as he rejects the AIDS support network, which is mostly attended by gay men, due to his homophobia, Woodruff is left to his own devices to try and access medications. Notably, it is in an archetypal space of heterosexual masculinity - a strip club - where he recognises an orderly from the hospital, and bribes him to steal AZT from the hospital pharmacy. Overdosing on the AZT, Woodruff is again hospitalised, and it is here that he meets Rayon, an intravenous drug-using trans sex worker who was able to get herself onto the limited AZT trial but is splitting her medication with a friend for \$5,000. He unsuccessfully attempts to cut himself into Rayon’s deal, but then realising the potential for profit and with his AZT connection depleted, Woodruff travels across the border into Mexico and meets with a deregistered American doctor who is experimenting on his own with a range of pharmaceuticals not yet approved and unavailable for purchase in the United States, including Peptide T. From here, he begins to smuggle large amounts of the drugs into the United States to sell them to gay men with AIDS in

⁶¹ Will Wright, *The Wild West: the Mythical Cowboy and Social Theory*, London, Sage, 2001, pp. 188-9.

similarly desperate circumstances. Joining forces again with Rayon, they start a buyers' club, whereby AIDS patients pay a monthly membership fee of \$400 for access to a range of untested, unapproved experimental AIDS medications smuggled into the country from various international sources. The villains in this narrative are the health industry and the American government (in the form of the FDA). When the Dallas Buyers' Club starts to become very popular amongst local AIDS patients, to the extent of attracting people away from the regulated AZT trials at the hospital and interfering with the study design and results, the FDA seeks to have Woodruff arrested. Woodruff takes the FDA to court, and whilst the judge is sympathetic to his case, he is powerless to prevent the bureaucratic regulation that is preventing Woodruff from legally obtaining Peptide T.

Similarly, individualism is centred in *Love for Life*, however it is characterised by the deployment of the notion of individual greed being the precursor to AIDS. Reading Zhou Xiaowen's 1995 film *Ermo*, in which a peasant woman from a rural village desperately works in the new capitalist economy to earn enough money to buy a large television set, Ann Anagnost traces how the titular character discovers the cash value of her blood in the neoliberal economy, and "it is Ermo herself who exploits the bare life of her body in service to commodity fetishism."⁶² Ermo's naive tunnel-vision in commodifying her own blood for the sake of purchasing a symbol of consumerist decadence that doesn't even fit properly in her modest house detracts, however, from the reality that "blood money was used to pay household debts to the state," a fact which "must be put into the larger context of why the agricultural economy has been reduced to the point where the balance sheet of a farming household is driven into deficit that can only be repaid with blood, as if blood were another form of agricultural produce."⁶³

Just as the emerging consumerist ideology is critiqued in *Ermo* as a problematic individual embodiment of the challenges of post-reform China - an individual moral failing - rather than an illustration of the failings of the government, in *Love for Life* part of the blame of the AIDS crisis is placed upon the rural poor who willingly sold their blood to the bloodheads. Zuo notes that the Communist Party employed "linguistic

⁶² Anagnost, p. 522.

⁶³ Ibid., p.518.

engineering” through the use of the homonym 爱资病 (*Àizībìng*) in place of 艾滋病 (*Àizībìng*), an English loanword approximating the acronym AIDS. By using the homonymic characters 爱资病 instead, which can be read as “love capitalism disease,” the government “implicitly denounced the *sale* of blood, rather than the *sharing* of sexual fluids, as a manifestation of a contaminated political-economic ideology.”⁶⁴ The characterisation of HIV/AIDS by the Chinese government as “love capitalism disease” both constructs HIV/AIDS as an import from the capitalist West and also implicates the blood donors in their own predicament by producing a moral narrative of individual desire as the driving force behind the crisis. In *Love for Life*, it emerges that the reason Qinqin sold her blood was that she saw a television commercial for expensive shampoo. As Zuo notes, “Qinqin’s desires to transform her body into silk, the most exotic export of the Chinese textile industry and earliest transnational connection to world markets, betray her ‘love capitalism disease.’”⁶⁵ Whilst this narrative obviously fails to account for the provincial government’s encouragement of the rural poor to sell their blood as a way of fuelling the burgeoning pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry as the agricultural industry failed following marketisation reforms, it goes further to suggest that the new economy has not simply alienated workers from their labour, but has alienated workers from their own life force. As such, the rural poor who sold their blood and contracted HIV through unsafe practices are constructed as what Lisa Rofel terms “desiring subjects” whose material desires are necessary to usher in the rise of the new post-socialist economy in China.⁶⁶ For Rofel, the cultural constitution of individual desire in China is both the product and cause of the transition away from the socialist economy as the wholesale engendering of new desiring subjectivities which provide the basis for the neoliberal economy, but which also come to heads with the moral economy of the authoritarian state.

The restorative nostalgic gaze in *Love for Life* is articulated through tensions between the public and the private that have exacerbated following the marketisation reforms of Dèng Xiǎopíng. Shao notes that the post-Mao reforms have been particularly evident in the realm of healthcare provision. The marketisation reforms of the 1980s witnessed a massive increase in health expenditure in China, from 14 billion to 663

⁶⁴ Zuo, p. 205.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.215.

⁶⁶ Rofel.

billion yuan between 1983 and 2003, yet the government spending on healthcare over this period saw a sharp drop.⁶⁷ Commensurate with neoliberal reforms in liberal democracies, the shifting of the economic burden from the public to the private has also increased health inequality and made access to healthcare in China more difficult for many of the rural and urban poor. Health insurance coverage in China is low, with more than 80% of rural and 50% of urban populations lacking health insurance, and the privatisation of health care provision in China has produced a “conflict of interest in which the provider has become a seller who makes choices for the buyer of medical services ... inevitably [putting] the consumer’s welfare in jeopardy.”⁶⁸ The shift to a consumer model of health care provision also further undermined the focus on prevention over treatment which constituted the former approach of China under socialism.⁶⁹

Shao argues that this conflict of interest is most evident in the example of the plasma economy in China. The blood that was extracted from donors in China was not used for simple transfusions, but rather was used as an ingredient in the production of a range of plasma-derived products including human serum albumin, immune globulin and coagulating factors.⁷⁰ Plasma is separated from blood in a process called fractionation, and the plasma is then used to produce pharmaceutical products. Shao argues that although the health benefits of albumin were disputed (and a 1997 study⁷¹ found that the use of albumin in surgery patients resulted in the death of 1 in every 17 patients), its production and use was encouraged in China, primarily for economic rather than health reasons. Due to the high cost of plasma products, in a health care system driven by consumption and profits, these products were assumed to be beneficial *because* they are expensive. As the private healthcare market grew in post-reform China, the demand for imported albumin products increased, and a domestic fractionation industry was established using the plasmapheresis techniques standardised by the Beijing Institute of Biological Products. In this method, the blood of multiple

⁶⁷ Shao, p. 546.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.544.

⁷¹ Cochrane Injuries Group Albumin Reviewers, 'Human Albumin Administration in Critically Ill Patients: Systematic Review of Randomised Controlled Trials', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, vol. 317, no. 7153, 1998.

donors was pooled together, the plasma separated, and the pooled red blood cells returned to the group of donors, which decreases the negative effects of donating blood, enables more blood to be donated at a time, and allows for more frequent donations.⁷² However this process, in combination with a broad deficit in meeting safety standards with respect to sterilisation, ensured that HIV and other blood-borne viruses had a direct and expansive spread amongst donors.

Ironically, the industry was bolstered by a decision in 1984 to ban the importation of blood products from “capitalist countries” owing to the perception that higher rates of homosexuality and IV drug use in the West posed a HIV threat to China, and the Ministry of Health planned to expand the domestic fractionation industry which would increase the profitability of plasma products by using “cheaper native raw material and the low cost of production using an outdated fractionation method.”⁷³ It is in this sense that the economy and the health industry are revealed to be intrinsically linked. Shao analogises that “the literal fluidity of plasma bears out the perfectly metaphoric fluidity of capital, and it is in the movement of both that health is realised in both fiscal and biological terms.”⁷⁴ Further, through the conversion of this “surplus” biological product, drawn from the cheap material sources (the bodies of rural agricultural workers, who have seen a decline in the value of their physical labour following market reforms and who now grow and sell blood in their bodies in the same way that agricultural products are grown and sold), into a product with a value in the free market has meant that the fractionation industry has become a key part of the health market. Shao notes that in a “cash-starved agricultural economy” whereby agricultural labour has been “displaced” by money, plasma “becomes cash, by virtue of the demand for albumin in a health industry hungry for volume expansion.”⁷⁵ The privatisation of the health system in China is emblematic of the withdrawal of the state from care and welfare of its citizens, abandoning impoverished rural communities to the fluctuations and instability of the free market and relying on individuals to provide for their own health needs.

⁷² Shao, pp. 546-7.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.548.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.554.

In both *Love for Life* and *Dallas Buyers Club* we see the recuperation of the memory of the AIDS crisis as an object with which to recast the history of the AIDS crisis. In doing so, key figures are exonerated: in China, the government's role in creating the conditions for the virus to spread and subsequently covering up AIDS arrival is displaced by the figure of the bloodhead and individual greed as the culprits, in the United States the figure of heterosexual masculinity is restored through Ron Woodruff as the cowboy saviour of PWAs in Texas, fighting a battle against an overbearing government and health sector. In both, hegemonic grand narratives can be seen as in a process of restoration and recuperation. However, the restorative nostalgic mode does not constitute the most often deployed optic in the AIDS retrovision.

Reflective Retrovisions

The reflective mode of nostalgia lingers in structures of feeling which emerge through the subjective process of recalling the past and considering its meaning in the present. Whereas restorative nostalgia “evokes national past and future,” reflective nostalgia “cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalises space.”⁷⁶ The two films I chart here are less commercially successful than *Dallas Buyers Club* and, as I show here, they are guided by a different nostalgic mode. However, commensurate with their status as retrovisions, they too bespeak certain logics of the political present through their representation of the AIDS past. Importantly, and in contrast to *Dallas Buyers Club* and *Love for Life*, the HBO adaptation of *The Normal Heart* and the independent film *Test* are clearly speaking to a gay audience and invoking specific histories of the AIDS crisis as it impacted gay male communities in the United States in the early-mid 1980s. The distinction in intended audiences between these two nostalgic modes further contributes to the ways in which AIDS histories are mobilised and the underlying messages they convey.

In 2011, Ryan Murphy announced that he would be directing a film adaptation of Larry Kramer's award-winning 1985 play *The Normal Heart* for the premium cable network HBO, with Kramer serving as screenwriter.⁷⁷ The thinly-veiled

⁷⁶ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 49.

⁷⁷ Nikki Finke, 'Emmys Q&A: Ryan Murphy About 'Glee'', *Deadline.com*, 5 August 2011, <http://deadline.com/2011/08/emmys-qa-with-ryan-murphy-about-glee-153242/>.

autobiographical account of Larry Kramer and the Gay Men's Health Crisis organisation in the early years of the AIDS epidemic in New York City recounts Kramer's founding, troubles and frustrations with the organisation in the midst of the onslaught of the AIDS epidemic. *The Normal Heart* exhibits a complex, multi-layered nostalgia. Not only is the film nostalgic for political and emotional frenzy of the early years of the AIDS crisis in New York City, but it is also nostalgic for a particular form of cultural production during the period. Covering the period 1981-1984, the play premiered in April of 1985 and constituted one example of gay male artistic and literary production depicting the crisis as it unfolded. Yet the film is also a revival of a revival, based on and initiated by the 2011 Broadway revival of the play. Whilst the film as a standalone cultural production can be understood as a nostalgia film in the sense that its origination, stylisation and emergence in a particular era point to a broader cultural obsession with the AIDS crisis years, nostalgia also features within the logic of the film itself, lamenting both the supposed "carelessness" and the utopian periodisation of the pre-AIDS years.

Chris Mason Johnson's 2014 film *Test* is set around a contemporary dance company in San Francisco in 1985, the year in which the first HIV antibody test was made available. In contrast to the narrative logic of the bulk of the AIDS film genre and in particular contrast to the AIDS retrovision film, it is not the counternostalgic frame of the periodised temporalities of the pre-, present and post-crisis modalities that is at the centre of the film. Similarly, although the film constitutes a "dance film" and engages with issues of corporeality, it does not engage in the forms of visual spectacle of the "AIDS-ravaged" body (as symbolised by the KS legion) that are associated with the AIDS film. *Test* is innovative in its subtlety, and in this aspect it utilises affect to encapsulate the particular psychic and social structures of feeling that HIV and AIDS inflicts on the gay male psyche. By engaging with a narrative that is at once familiar and temporally distant - the liminal space between an uncertain and a positive serostatus and the paranoid psychic meanderings while waiting for results - Johnson presents a nostalgic film that succeeds in capturing a specific historical moment within a broader context of the shared collective memory of the AIDS crisis years.

In the reflective AIDS retrovision, temporality is mediated in two ways. Firstly, the audience is interpellated into a subject position primed for the experience of

prosthetic memories of the AIDS crisis through the sensuous deployment of retro signifiers. Objects, sounds, film techniques and aesthetics are all carefully curated in these films in order to trigger prosthetic memory processes in an audience presumed not to have experienced the crisis first-hand. Secondly, both of these films engage an intradiegetic metanostalgia, reflexively referencing the pre-AIDS era in dialogue or through flashback in order to demarcate these periods and establish a clear causal relationship between the excess of sexual liberation and the onset of the AIDS crisis. In doing so, they encourage a reading of the past which demands normativity in the present in order to safeguard the future; that is, they posit “de-generational unremembering” (Castiglia and Reed 2012) as a prophylactic strategy.

Temporality in Reflective Retrovisions: Retro

In *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson argues that the nostalgia film interpellates the viewer through the utilisation of aesthetic signifiers that superficially invoke a specific era. Using Lawrence Kasdan’s 1981 neo-noir thriller *Body Heat* as an example, Jameson notes how the stylisation of the text in the opening credits, in an art deco font, “serves at once to programme the spectator for the appropriate ‘nostalgia’ mode of reception.”⁷⁸ The use of nostalgic aesthetic referents which “begin to distance the officially contemporary image from us in time”⁷⁹ is blatantly apparent in *The Normal Heart*, which opens with a retro 1980s HBO bumper (Fig. 2.1) in place of the current HBO branding. From the outset, this signifier situates the film in the nostalgic mode, serving as a trigger to those old enough to remember the network’s visual identity in the 1980s whilst simultaneously serving as an empty aesthetic signifier for those too young to have lived memories of the network in the 1980s but who are armed with the cultural capital to identify the aesthetic and place it within a chronological visual landscape of graphic design.

⁷⁸ Jameson, p. 67.

⁷⁹ Ibid.



Fig. 2.1: Retro stylisation of the HBO logo in the opening of *The Normal Heart*

For Elizabeth Guffey, retro “quotes styles from the past, but applies them in anomalous settings” in a way that suggests that “the culture of revival has changed.”⁸⁰ Guffey defines retro as not merely a “recapitulation of the past” but importantly an aesthetic mode that “focuses on the recent past, even if it might seem to have slipped out of sight only yesterday.”⁸¹ In contrast to nostalgia, which for Guffey is characterised by a sense of emotional reverence, retro is characterised by its emotional detachment, cynicism and irony. Guffey asserts that retro belongs in the realm of the popular; it is an anachronistic method of engaging with history that deals in empty signifiers which “evoke a memory of days that are not quite so distant, embodied in forms that are antiquated yet vaguely familiar.”⁸² However, as I shall demonstrate here, both *The Normal Heart* and *Test* can be understood as cinematic “activations” of memory, and further, can be understood as subcultural activations of prosthetic memory. These films utilise retro signifiers to engage collective prosthetic memory in two ways. Firstly, they deploy nostalgic material objects to evoke a sensuous and pleasurable sense of physical attachment to the past. Secondly, they carefully incorporate diegetic and non-diegetic music in order to aurally trigger affective relations to the era.

The deployment of nostalgic material objects is most pronounced in *Test* through the use of the Sony Walkman cassette player. Invented in Japan in 1980 and exported internationally soon after, the Sony Walkman was the original mobile personal

⁸⁰ Elizabeth E Guffey, *Retro: The Culture of Revival*, London, Reaktion Books, 2006, p. 12.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.17.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.26.

music device, which incorporated cassette-tape technology with a battery-powered, portable player and personal headphones to enable personal consumption of music in a portable context. Famously utilised as a case study for Paul du Gay's field-defining text *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (1997), in which du Gay demonstrated in practical terms what he termed the "circuit of culture," the Walkman constitutes what Shuhei Hosokawa terms a "music mobilis" whose effect on the conceptualisation of private and public space in an urban context "represents parasitic and/or symbiotic *self* which has now become autonomous and mobile."⁸³ Hosokawa argues that to "think about [the Walkman] is to reflect on the urban itself: Walkman as urban strategy, as urban sonic/musical device."⁸⁴ In *Test*, the Walkman serves three functions. Firstly, as an iconic object associated with a particular moment in the history of the consumer products, the Walkman serves as a retro object which instantly places the film within a particular historical setting of the early 1980s. Second, the Walkman serves as a formal device in the film which enables a consistent interplay of soundscapes that blurs the boundaries between diegetic and non-diegetic sound. Finally, and reliant on the formal possibilities engendered by the previous, the Walkman serves a narrative function as an affective window into Frankie's psychic interiority.

Whilst the opening titles cogently situate the film within a specific temporal and spatial setting and articulate the film's position within a broader cultural discourse of the history of the AIDS crisis in the United States, this is not enough to satisfy the demands of the suspension of disbelief. As such, *Test* engages in multiple significations of what Fredric Jameson might call the 'eighties-ness' associated with the nostalgia film. Jameson's critique of the nostalgia film entered on the mobilisation of postmodern pastiche in the service of "the desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past" which is "now refracted through the iron law of fashion change and the emergent ideology of the 'generation.'"⁸⁵ Whilst on the one hand the gimmicky incorporation of the Walkman as an aesthetic object of historicity - in addition to the attention paid to costuming, set and prop design in accordance with a period film - aligns with Jameson's negative view of the nostalgia film, the narrative and formal innovations engendered by this retro object demonstrate the potential for the "nostalgia mode" to break through from Jameson's

⁸³ Shuhei Hosokawa, 'The Walkman Effect', *Popular Music*, vol. 4, 1984, p. 166.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Jameson, p. 66.

characterisation as “an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way.”⁸⁶ In the first scene of the film, Frankie encounters Todd, who will become his complicated love interest, in the kitchen at a house party. The first exchange of dialogue in the film situates the Walkman as a meaningful object, as Frankie’s first words in the film are to ask Todd if he has a Walkman, proclaim that he recently purchased one, and describe how “the music always fits whatever you see, like a soundtrack.” In *Test* we are encouraged to actively experience history through the affective potential of music in film as an entry point into Frankie’s interiority.

The utilisation of the Walkman as formal device makes itself apparent in the following scene. The scene begins with close shots that speak to the fetishisation of the retro object, as Frankie handles the object, inserts a cassette and presses play. As we see the tape spooling in a circular motion, we cut to Frankie walking in an urban residential environment. He stops as he walks past a mattress that has been spray painted in red paint with the words “AIDS FAGGOT DIE.” As Frankie walks through the city, he is underscored by the sounds of a conventional, dreamy electronic film score that viewer assumes, due to its timbre, tone, lack of percussion and elongated notes, to be a conventional non-diegetic score. We then cut to Frankie at the dance studio, hanging upside-down on a parallel bar as other dancers stretch nearby. Medium range shots of male dancers stretching, with Frankie seen in the back, headphones still on, are accompanied by what we assume to be the continuing non-diegetic film score. When Frankie gets up of the beam and opens the cassette deck on his Walkman, however, the score abruptly cuts away mid-note to reveal its true diegetic nature. Whilst not particularly significant in terms of the narrative of the film, what this introduction to the Walkman-as-formal-device induces in the audience is an awareness of the formal logic of the film, an interpellation into the structure and schema of Walkman’s power over the semantic meaning of music and sound in the film. In her influential study of the history of music in cinema, Claudia Gorbman notes that music is able to signify in film “not only according to pure musical codes, but also according to cultural musical codes and cinematic musical codes.”⁸⁷ Gorbman notes that the “ease in crossing narrational

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.68.

⁸⁷ Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 2-3.

borders” between the diegetic and non-diegetic “puts music in a position to free the image from strict realism,” demonstrating one method in which music, “as something not very consciously perceived” is able to “[inflect] the narrative with emotive values via cultural musical codes.”⁸⁸ Following the introduction to this logic of cinematic sound in *Test*, the filmmaker is free to reuse the formal device throughout the rest of the narrative to produce an affective response in the viewer; it is through the repetition of this formal device that the key nostalgic component of the narrative - the sense of paranoia, fear and anxiety that defined the inner psychic space of the urban gay male in San Francisco at the time of the introduction of the HIV antibody test - is achieved. Thus, in defiance of Jameson’s argument that the incorporation of superficial signifiers such as costuming and retro objects bespeaks a lack of active and affective potential in the nostalgia film, in *Test* it is the retro object itself which enables this affective mode of reception. In the numerous later sequences in which the Walkman features, its historical and cultural significance as a gadget that remarkably reconfigured the meaning and form of consuming music and navigating the urban environment is made apparent. Hosokawa notes that the Walkman user “seems to cut the auditory contact with the outer world where he really lives: seeking the perfection of his ‘individual’ zone of listening, he is the minimum, mobile and intelligent unit for music listening.”⁸⁹ This production of an autonomous “self-enclosure”⁹⁰ at once provides for the acoustic retreat and shielding of the listener from the surrounding urban environment whilst also, in its cinematic mobilisation, enables audience relation to the interiority of the character within the narrative. Articulated sonically through the use of a pseudo-diegetic score enabled by the gimmick of the retro device and visually through the combination of close facial shots of Frankie’s anxious expressions and distant shots of Frankie walking alone through the urban environment, the nostalgic frame that seeks to reimagine the AIDS crisis years in San Francisco does so through affect and subtlety rather than visual or narrative spectacle.

The Normal Heart is also notable for its use of diegetic and non-diegetic music as a retro signifier. What is particularly striking in regards to the promulgation of prosthetic memory of the AIDS crisis, however, are the ways in which certain songs are

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.4.

⁸⁹ Hosokawa, p. 167.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.165.

used which invoke a multilayered nostalgic affect. The film features two songs in particular which are notable as they originated in the 1970s and 1980s but were later covered and sampled in popular songs of the 1990s and 2000s. For the viewer born after the AIDS crisis, the hook-lines of these songs initially invoke nostalgic memories of songs from their own personal memories, and it is not until the songs reveal themselves as originals that they are understood as songs from the period of the film.

Popular music's ability to be acutely placed within a particular temporal and cultural categorisation encourages its heavy use within the nostalgia film. Music that is either "of the time" or that is able to evoke a particular historical era can be used either diegetically or non-diegetically in the nostalgia film, as film scholar David Shumway articulated in his 1999 account of the use of popular music in six nostalgia films. However, Shumway argues that the films in his study deploy popular music and nostalgia "to different political ends" and thus "taken together they call into question the assigning of any particular politics to the nostalgia film or nostalgia itself."⁹¹ For Shumway, the commodification of nostalgia and the decreasing cycles of nostalgic revivalism in the last quarter of the twentieth century raise the possibility of multiple valences of nostalgic affect in the viewer: the revival of such recent history triggers "personal nostalgia"⁹² for those who remember the period from lived experience whilst also evokes nostalgia for those who have no lived memory of the period but who, through the broader commodification and representation of the recent past in mass media, are able to place the reference within a historical schema. Shumway suggests that "if hearing an old song on the radio invites us to remember our own past, movies use the same technique to evoke the fiction of a common past."⁹³

In the case of *The Normal Heart*, periodised popular music is a central element in situating the film within the nostalgic mode. The particular songs that are used, especially in the 'pre-crisis' scenes at Fire Island Pines, are of interest due to their uncanny ability for the sort of bifurcated nostalgic aural triggering they evoke. The opening scene of *The Normal Heart* represents an era that was both at its peak and unknowingly about to witness its sudden and intense decimation. The decadence and

⁹¹ David R Shumway, 'Rock'n'roll Sound Tracks and the Production of Nostalgia', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 38, no. 2, 1999, p. 36.

⁹² Ibid., p.40.

⁹³ Ibid.

carefree sexual excess that is articulated in this first scene is sonically attenuated with the genre of music that is so overwhelmingly associated with the emergence of the urban gay male culture. Walter Hughes noted the important relationship of a particular genre of music to gay male identity:

Historically, disco was part of the post-Stonewall project of reconstituting those persons medically designated “homosexuals” as members of a “gay” minority group, and of rendering them visible, individually and collectively. As such, it contributed to the construction of one highly publicised sector of the developing “gay community,” urban gay males, a construction advanced by both the mass media and the urban gay males themselves.⁹⁴

Hughes argues that more than merely being a genre that is associated with the synthetic, superficial and ‘mindless’ urban gay male culture, disco should be conceptualised as “less a decadence indulgence than a disciplinary, regulatory discourse that paradoxically permits, even creates, a form of freedom;” further, as the precursor to electronic music, the genre has never *died* but rather is particularly predisposed to revival and recycling.⁹⁵ Two of the songs that feature in *The Normal Heart* are of interest as they serve dual nostalgic purposes. Firstly, the original songs are contemporaneous with the historical setting, that is, they are songs of the period that the audience is able to place as being popular in the gay discotheques of New York City in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But secondly, and more importantly, they are songs that were revived or sampled in popular songs in the 1990s and 2000s. This is crucial because the aim of the reflective/melancholic AIDS retrovision is not merely to provide nostalgic reminiscing for the generation who engage with AIDS history by way of personal lived experience, but to induce nostalgic affect for a younger generation whose practices of remembrance of the AIDS crisis are drawn from collective memory and the representation of the past. The first such example occurs during a scene on the beach at Fire Island Pines. As Ned Weeks and Mickey Marcus, the older two of the group of gay New York men in the friendship circle, are walking along the shoreline past younger and less-clothed men playing volleyball and throwing footballs in the summer sunshine, the distinctive hook-line from Tom Tom Club’s 1981 song ‘Genius of Love’ is heard non-diegetically. The hook-line was heavily sampled by Mariah Carey in her 1995 chart-topping single ‘Fantasy’. The second example occurs in a later scene and could be

⁹⁴ Walter Hughes, ‘Feeling Mighty Real: Disco as Discourse and Discipline’, *Village Voice Rock & Roll Quarterly*, 1993, pp. 7-10.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.10.

understood as diegetic, occurring on a catwalk fashion show. Ned Weeks joins Bruce Niles to watch Bruce's model boyfriend Albert walk down the runway, his facial KS lesions still visible under layers of thick makeup. The models walk down the runway to Patrice Rushen's aptly titled 1982 song 'Forget-Me-Nots', which was heavily sampled by Will Smith for his 1997 single 'Men In Black', the titular single from the blockbuster action film franchise. It is in the use of these particular songs that *The Normal Heart*'s interesting invocation of nostalgia is apparent. In addition to the use of other popular disco and new-wave songs of the period that have maintained status as recognisable gay male anthems - Sylvester's 'You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)' and Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive' to name just two - the use of these slightly more obscure songs from the period interpellates both the generation who remember the original and the younger generation for whom the songs which sampled the originals invoke their own sense of nostalgia for the late 1990s. In doing so, the generation detached from the AIDS crisis years is involved in the triggering of their own nostalgia whilst simultaneously being brought into dialogue with awareness of intergenerational history.

Temporality in Reflective Retrovisions: Metanostalgia

As I have demonstrated above, both *Test* and *The Normal Heart* instrumentalise nostalgia and engender prosthetic memories of the years of the AIDS crisis in the United States by deploying a range of visual, narrative, material and aural retro signifiers. These signifiers serve to ground the viewer in the particular historical moment which these films are representing. This strategy is complemented by an engagement within the films themselves of the historicity of gay male sexual cultures prior to the onset of the AIDS crisis. Crucially, the semantic politics of these historical engagements rest on the use of metanostalgia as a way to articulate intergenerational queer cultural bonds. Yet this multilayered form of nostalgia – which is conveyed intradiegetically by the characters themselves engaging in processes of nostalgic remembrance of earlier gay male cultures – constitutes what Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed term 'de-generational un-remembering'. In both *Test* and *The Normal Heart*, the act of remembering the pre-AIDS 'golden age' of gay male sexual cultures from the historical position of the AIDS crisis and the subject position of the implicated can be understood as a critique of pre-AIDS sexual practices. I posit that the contemporary reception of this critique, articulated through metanostalgia, is imbricated

in a view that calls for a prophylactic ‘un-remembering’ of historical gay male sexual cultures and practices in favour of normativity and monogamy as a salve to ensure a ‘healthy’ future.

In *Test*, this metanostalgia is achieved most clearly in the final scene of the film. Lying in bed with love interest Todd for the first time, awkwardly and anxiously making small-talk, Frankie reaches into the cultural past in order to make sense of the defining material object that serves as both an historical demarcation and an interventionist salvation: the condom.

FRANKIE:	Do you remember that movie ‘Looking for Mr. Goodbar’, with Diane Keaton?
TODD:	Yeah
FRANKIE:	There’s that scene where she’s having sex with some wimpy guy and he pulls out a condom and she just laughs at him it’s so ridiculous. She blows it up like a balloon. Have you tried them?
TODD:	I bought some.
FRANKIE:	Me too, I haven’t used them yet.
TODD:	Me neither.

As they playfully inflate the condoms like balloons, Frankie passes Todd an unwrapped condom, indicating they should use it. “If we don’t have it, what’s the point?” Todd asks, and Frankie replies “rehearsing.” The fact that *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* was referenced in this scene is significant. Richard Brooks’ 1977 film, based on Judith Rossner’s 1975 best-selling book by the same name, is out of print of VHS and has never been released in a digital format, despite performing well at the box office when it was originally in theatres. As such, it is somewhat of an archaism, an ‘authentic’ and inaccessible nostalgic cultural object of the 1970s. In the film, Diane Keaton portrays the character of Theresa Dunn, a teacher who has entered the sexually liberated environment of the 1970s both repulsed and fascinated by the culture of sexual experimentation in San Francisco.⁹⁶ She pursues men for one-night stands at seedy bars, slowly becoming addicted to the rush of having sex with dangerous men. In the final scene, she picks up a sexually confused war veteran who is unable to get an erection, and when she asks him to leave, he misinterprets this as an insinuation that he is gay, and he beats and rapes her, finally stabbing her to death. In the context of the late 1970s,

⁹⁶ In the book, which is based on the murder of a New York schoolteacher in 1973, the setting is Manhattan.

both the film and book portray the dangers of the newfound sexual freedoms of that decade, particularly in relation to women being able to explore casual sex with multiple partners. As the final scene in *Test*, appearing after both Frankie and Todd have received negative results for HIV and are pondering what the new reality of gay sexual culture in the AIDS era entails, the message remains the same.

In *The Normal Heart*, a similar yet less subtle demarcation of pre-AIDS sexual excess is articulated through an innovative flashback scene. The cinematic flashback, argues Maureen Turim, articulates the “subjective memory” which doubles as both a rendering of “history as a subjective experience of a character in the fiction” in addition to representing “the Subject in history as the viewer of the film identifying with fictional characters positioned in a fictive social reality.”⁹⁷ The flashback can thus serve not only to solidify the present-tense narrative by way of inclusion of the narrative’s past, but also to interrogate the fallibility of individual memory and the fragmentary nature of collective history.

In the context of viewing *The Normal Heart* as a nostalgia film that facilitates the transmission of disembodied intergenerational cultural memory, the formal aspects of one particular flashback scene are noteworthy. Alison Landsberg suggests that “the filmic medium has had a major impact on memory, fostering the experience of ‘prosthetic memory.’”⁹⁸ Drawing from Bill Schwartz’s work on mediation and historicity, Landsberg argues that the division between “historical time” as a temporal reality and mediated representations of time has blurred through increasing mediation to the point that “the way we experience time in mediated contexts helps to condition and shape out perceptions of the time we live.”⁹⁹ In the sense that the cinematic device of the flashback can be understood as a “privileged moment” of a narrative that “juxtaposes different moments of temporal reference”¹⁰⁰ and articulates the subjectivity of personal memory, the flashback scene in *The Normal Heart*, which is drawn from a simple and brief dialogue exchange in the play and transformed into a hypermediated fantasy scene in the film adaptation, poignantly illustrates the paucity of individual

⁹⁷ Maureen Turim, *Flashbacks in Film: Memory & History*, London, Routledge, 1989, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Alison Landsberg, 'Cinematic Temporality: Modernity, Memory and the Nearness of the Past', in Emily Keightley (ed.), *Time, Media and Modernity*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 92.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.87.

¹⁰⁰ Turim, p. 1.

memory and the impact of mediated collective representation of history on the formation of prosthetic memory. Towards the end of an awkward first date at Ned's apartment, love interest Felix expresses frustration that Ned has failed to recollect the fact that Ned and Felix had met previously. "Ned, you don't remember me, do you?" Felix asks. "It was at the baths a few years ago." A cheesy non-diegetic 1970s baseline and beat from Salsoul Orchestra's 1976 disco-funk track 'Nice 'n Nasty' emerges as the filmic space shifts from Ned's confused expression in his apartment to what appears to be a campy 1970s television advertisement for a gay sauna called 'Man's Country'. A deep male voice provides the advert's voiceover:

VOICEOVER: Come to Man's Country. See what we're about, and what we have to offer. Man's Country is a full-facility, multi-level complex that is designed to have something for everyone. Come to Man's Country to develop your body, or a friendship with somebody else's. Visit us once, and you'll come again and again.



Fig. 2.2 & 2.3: Pseudo-video colour compositions and retro aesthetics of the gay baths flashback scene in *The Normal Heart*.

It is important to note the shift in filmic aesthetic from the standard contemporary high-definition of the 'present-tense' of the film (itself set in 1981) to the pseudo-video blurriness and colour composition of the flashback (Fig. 2.2 & 2.3). The montage in the advert begins with an exterior shot of the building and a prominent 'Man's Country' sign and continues with various short clips showing men cruising through areas of the baths, from the entry, to the locker room, to the poolside and the sauna, and campy split-screen shots of semi-naked, muscular men lifting weights in the gym. As the camera pans across the sauna, lit in purple, we see two men having oral sex. The camera continues to pan to reveal our frame as a window, and through the

adjoining door, Ned Weeks, dressed in a towel walks out of the sauna and nods his head to acknowledge Felix Turner, sitting in the spa. Throughout this exchange, the campy video aesthetic, voiceover and soundtrack continue, placing Ned and Felix within this fantasy flashback. As Felix follows Ned through the baths, the volume of the music lowers, the blurriness recedes and the colour filter adjusts, signalling a transition from the 1970s fantasy advert to a more serious recollection. We return to Ned's apartment in the present moment of the narrative, as Felix continues recalling to Ned, "you would have thought I was applying to the CIA, the way you looked at me." Ned shakes his head, smiling, and says "and then what happened?" Returning to the flashback at the baths, Felix's voice carries over the top of the scene, narrating the action onscreen: "I followed you into your room. You couldn't even open your eyes. You told me your real name was Alexander." Within the space of the flashback scene in the baths, Ned and Felix are seen engaging in rough, impersonal and anonymous sexual exchange, with Ned's facial expression indicating a sense of discomfort and shame. By incorporating this flashback into the narrative and situating an original meeting in the baths years prior to the emergence of AIDS in New York City, *The Normal Heart* produces a sense of temporal separation between a supposed 'golden age' of anonymous, pseudo-public gay male sexuality and the emergent necessity (as Ned/Larry Kramer understands it to be) of a new sexual morality in order to quell the 'gay disease'.

Analysing Joseph Lovett's 2005 documentary *Gay Sex in the 70s*, Gilad Padva argues that by framing the promiscuity and Dionysian sexual excesses of that decade as the direct (and sole) cause of the devastation of the AIDS crisis that followed in the next decade, the film demonstrates what Castiglia refers to as "counternostalgia." Padva argues that the film oscillates between a "spectacular portrayal of a Dionysian gay community as a promiscuous collective celebrating its sexual energy in an unbound, mad, callous and destructive wasteful manner" and "the neo-conservative, Apollonian preaching that warns its viewer about the dangers of promiscuous, uncontrolled sexual practice."¹⁰¹ In doing so, the film is both nostalgic and counternostalgic, in a way that "does not really make a distinction between promiscuity and AIDS."¹⁰² This is constitutive of the processes of de-generational un-remembering as posited by Castiglia

¹⁰¹ Gilad Padva, *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 70.

¹⁰² Ibid.

and Reed, and can similarly be witnessed in the framing of these scenes from *Test* and *The Normal Heart* above. By constructing a causal relationship between sexual promiscuity and the AIDS crisis, disregarding the political and economic contexts that produced the devastation of the AIDS crisis, both of these scenes articulate a concerted vision that identifies homonormative monogamy as the salve of gay health and futurity. This is particularly pronounced in the next scene in *Test*. It is the morning after Frankie and Todd have had sex together for the first time, and as they are lying in Frankie's bed sharing a cigarette, the processes of de-generational un-remembering are solidified, as both Frankie's anxieties about sex and Todd's proximity to risk through sex work are ameliorated through the logic of cultural amnesia:

TODD:	I hardly ever sleep with anyone my own age. Well, nearly my own age.
FRANKIE:	Yeah, me neither. [Pause] I wonder if there's gonna be this like wave of monogamy 'cause of all of this.
TODD:	[Looking up at Frankie] Well, I mean, it's one way to be sure, right?
FRANKIE:	I guess. It seems so unnatural, you know? Just being with one person. It's like some sort of massive unnatural challenge... It's like a test.



Fig. 2.4: Compositional symmetry enunciates homonormativity in *Test*.

Shifting from the shot-counter-shot format of close-ups of Frankie and Todd as they deliver their lines to a medium shot from a low angle that positions the couple in

bed, exchanging eye contact, in the centre of the frame, with perfect symmetry offered by the bay window and retro lamps on either side of the bed (Fig 2.4), the scene transitions into credits at the cue of the distinctive sound of Jimmy Somerville's high-pitched voice singing at the beginning of the gay anthem 'Smalltown Boy' by the 1980s UK synth-pop band Bronski Beat. Although this ending is open, this final dialogue, which illuminates on the title of the film, posits that the real 'test' is not informed by antibodies but rather by gay men's ability to conform to a new sexual order of monogamy as a requirement to ensure health. It is in this scene that we see the coalescing of conflicting narratives of sexuality, normativity, pleasure, and risk in *Test*, and this narrative closure must be read in terms the post-AIDS processes of cultural amnesia that have sought to distance contemporary gay sexual life from a supposedly irresponsible past. As Castiglia and Reed note:

The recent resurgence of assimilative political initiatives - for gay marriage and military service, most notably - are sustained by narratives that, in the guise of exposing a corrupt sexual past, directly or implicitly urge queers to distance themselves from the tainted past and to structure their lives along cleaner, healthier lines that end up replicating normative heterosexuality.¹⁰³

In *Test*, the dangers of HIV in the years of the AIDS epidemic are presented as being ameliorated through homogeneity and monogamy rather than through the rich and diverse forms of negotiation, mediation and intervention that were invented through the promiscuous sexual cultures of urban gay men whose resilience, adaptability and community networks were integral to the development of strategies to reduce transmission. Furthermore, by contrasting the naiveté and sexual irresponsibility of the older men in Frankie's sexual life with the disciplinary regimes embodied by Frankie and his peers in terms of condom adoption and monogamy, in *Test* we see hints of an insinuation of de-generation, of the "look back in fury that represents the sexual 'excesses' of the pre-AIDS generation as immature, pathological, and diseased, and that diagnoses willed forgetting as prophylactic health."¹⁰⁴

I have thus demonstrated the key mobilisations of endemic temporality in the reflective AIDS retrovision: firstly, the interpellation of a nostalgic viewing subject by the use of retro signifiers which temporally locate the film within a particular historical

¹⁰³ Castiglia and Reed, pp. 47-8.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

and cultural moment, triggering nostalgic modes of reception which engage both organic and prosthetic memories in the viewer. Secondly, I have demonstrated how metanostalgia functions in both of these films, where the characters themselves are presented as engaging with intradiegetic nostalgia for the pre-AIDS past which ultimately serves to proscribe normativity and monogamy in order to protect the future. Whilst the AIDS nostalgia film is inherently deferential to readings of temporality, I will now turn to the ways in which space and territory are historicised and recodified in these films. As I will show, the use of space in these films similarly contributes to the processes of de-generational un-remembering.

Space in Reflective Retrovisions

Concomitant with nostalgia's longing for home, the visual reimagining of New York City and San Francisco in *The Normal Heart* and *Test* respectively serve as important elements of the melancholic nostalgic affect these films invoke. However, both of these films demonstrate particular mobilisations of space which speak to a post-crisis reconfiguration of public and private intimacy.

Owing both to the possibilities engendered by the adaptation to the filmic medium and to the role of space within the schema of the nostalgia film, one of the key points of interest in the construction of *The Normal Heart* as AIDS nostalgia is through the use of space in the film. Whereas the physical setting of the play is restricted to interior spaces in Manhattan - Ned's apartment, Dr Emma Brookner's office, Felix's hospital room - the film adaptation makes significant use of exterior spaces, and of Fire Island Pines in particular. The film opens with a prelude scene depicting the height of the bacchanalian excesses immediately prior to first cases of AIDS in the gay community in the United States, and subsequently serves as a location to depict Ned and Felix's respectable homonormative domesticity as they purchase a cottage together and, finally, to solidify the causality of the AIDS crisis when the film returns to the island for the funeral of the first character to die from AIDS and the setting for a depiction of Felix's rapid decline in health.

Fire Island is a sand barrier island on the southern shore of Long Island in New York state, two hours away from Manhattan. Two hamlets on the island hold particular historical significance for lesbians and gays: Cherry Grove was noted from as early as

the 1940s as America's first "lesbian and gay town" and the more affluent Fire Island Pines became associated with post-Stonewall urban gay men from New York City who built lavish summer houses in the 1970s and 1980s. Historian Esther Newton notes that the town of Cherry Grove was a popular getaway location for the New York City theatre crowd from the 1930s onwards, and that "from the first the Grove represented the fulfilment of the American dream for gay people."¹⁰⁵ Newton points to the significance of a coherent physical space in which lesbians and gays could experience a sense of being that was not confined to the margins of a given social space but rather constituted the social majority, and thus engender the development of a subculture through spatialisation:

The exhilarating freedom in the Grove simulated a flowering of camp culture, the special sensibility that has been a gay creation. In theatre, parties, social dancing, and sexual adventuring, gays used gender-bending symbolism, wit, and inventiveness to help lay the ground-work for the culture explosion that was to follow in the 1960s. In an era of unmitigated repression and hostility towards homosexuals, they created a paradoxical paradise, somewhat analogous to the blossoming of Jewish ghetto culture in the medieval and Renaissance Baltic states, where a despised people was also allowed great autonomy within fixed geographic limits.¹⁰⁶

From the 1970s, Fire Island Pines was a popular summer vacation spot for upwardly mobile gay men from New York City, and was the setting for many gay parties and events. As a gay space that exists within a 'system' of New York City but physically separates from Manhattan, Fire Island can be understood as an extension of the already proliferating gay spaces within New York City itself, in particular the gay ghetto of Greenwich Village. Kath Weston notes that the 'gay imaginary' has always been a spatial imaginary, and this results in "a sexual geography in which the city represents the beacon of tolerance and gay community, the country a locus of persecution and gay absence" within the context of the coming out narratives of what she terms the "Great Gay Migration" of the 1970s and 1980s from the rural to the urban.¹⁰⁷ In the schema of gay spatiality, Fire Island presents a conceptual challenge in that it is constituted as a gay space outside of the traditional urban setting of gay spaces. In this sense, it represents both a victory for post-Stonewall gay and lesbian commercial

¹⁰⁵ Esther Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2014, p. 28.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.39.

¹⁰⁷ Kath Weston, 'Get Thee to a Big City: Sexual Imaginary and the Great Gay Migration', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1995, p. 282.

culture and an aberration in an era of continuing intolerance and harassment of gays and lesbians outside the safety zones of the urban gay ghettos. As such, it is constructed as a gay haven away from the pressures of the City and the presumed intolerance of small-town America; Fire Island becomes a gay utopia.

In the context of contemporary lesbian and gay politics in the United States at the time of the development and release of *The Normal Heart*, in which the “politics of inclusion” inhabits the centre of lesbian and gay political demands,¹⁰⁸ the addition of Fire Island as a setting within the narrative of *The Normal Heart* can be read through a queer spatial analysis as a form of “countermemory.” As Kath Weston argues in relation to the “Great Gay Migration,” the gay subculture in the United States was produced through a non-normative spatiality and a distinct sense of spatial navigation. In addition to waves of lesbian and gay migration from rural to urban locales, the specific urban spaces in which gay sexual culture existed were clandestine. As D’Emilio notes, the historical and economic processes that led to the emergence of gay urban spaces - the industrial revolution, which detached economic production from the locus of the family unit and enabled individuals to earn wages through labour; the massive social dislocations engendered by the nationwide movement of individuals during WWII - also reshaped urban public space.¹⁰⁹ Further, as public urban space has traditionally been coded as male space, the emergence of clandestine forms of public sex between men - in public bathrooms, parks, waterfronts, dark alleyways and empty piers - instituted a non-normative spatiality of gay culture within public space. However, as noted by Michael Warner, as lesbians and gays in the post-AIDS era accumulated increasing amounts of political purchase and retreated from a politics of sexuality difference to a politics of normative inclusion, public sex and gay public spaces are both a target for gentrification and ‘purification’ in addition to being spatial sites that serve as the example for amnesiac disavowal of a gay sexual past.¹¹⁰ *The Normal Heart*’s HBO adaptation can be read as a form of de-generational un-remembering as it emerges in a gay political climate in which the sexual excesses of the past are disavowed in favour of a

¹⁰⁸ Warner, p. xiv.

¹⁰⁹ John D’Emilio, ‘Gay Politics and Community in San Francisco since World War II’, in Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and Jr. Geroge Chauncey (eds), *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, London, Penguin Books, 1989, p. 459.

¹¹⁰ Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 170.

desexualised and depoliticised lesbian and gay constituency whose primary political fight is for inclusion within the privatised and domestic heteronormative order. Michael Warner suggests that post-AIDS politics and the increasing privatisation of sexual culture are exemplified by contemporary lesbian and gay politics of inclusion:

A shift in the nature and temporality of the AIDS crisis has dissolved the counterpublic activism and collective will of the AIDS movement, now in spectacular disarray. Gay journalists are repudiating the legacy of safer sex, depicting lesbians as sexless homebodies whom gay men should imitate and gay male sexual culture as a zone of irresponsibility, narcissism, and death. Gay marriage is understood by many to offer the postpolitical privacy now described as the only thing we ever wanted. In this context the lesbian and gay movement has feebly resisted the trends I have described. The erosion of public sexual culture, including its nonnormative intimacies, is too often cheered on by lesbian and gay advocates.¹¹¹

These processes of depoliticisation and normalisation are at once spatial and temporal. Lisa Duggan argues that lesbian and gay politics have always been concerned with defining the boundaries of the public and private, and suggests that historical movements in lesbian and gay politics have been involved in the ‘remapping’ of these divisions. Duggan notes that the homophile movements of the 1950s and 1960s fought complicated battles between the right to ‘privacy’ as coded in terms of freedom from the “intrusive, investigatory labelling powers of the state” and access to ‘public’ life.¹¹² After Stonewall, Duggan argues, the rhetoric of gay liberation in the 1970s was increasingly concerned with “the contest over the meanings of public and private, and the related meanings of democracy and autonomy in collective and personal life” which demanded “continuing remapping of a right-to-privacy-in-public and a right to publicise ‘private’ matters considered offensive to the phantom ‘general public.’”¹¹³ The AIDS crisis however engendered new forms of normativity in lesbian and gay political organising. Duggan charts the rise of neoconservative gay political actors such as Andrew Sullivan who espouse neoliberal conservatism and the rhetoric of privatisation to advocate for a politics of inclusion that is envisioned as a final political act for gays and lesbians. Duggan terms this nascent politics, which now encompasses the mainstream of lesbian and gay political activism, as “the new homonormativity” which recasts gay politics within the framework of neoliberalism and “does not contest

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.163.

¹¹² Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, Boston, Beacon Press, 2003, p. 51.

¹¹³ Ibid., pp.52-3.

dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.”¹¹⁴ Michael Warner suggests that the homonormative impulses of the post-AIDS lesbian and gay political movement involves complicity with acts of spatial governance and remapping. Accounting for the targeting of public cruising sites in New York City, Warner suggests that the tactics taken by New York City officials, police and mainstream media in demonising these sites should not be simply understood as acts of homophobia, because the target of these acts is not homosexual identity, but public sex; as such, these acts “aim to exterminate a practice and the culture surrounding it, rather than an identity.”¹¹⁵ Warner goes on to argue that gay and lesbian politics have been “predicated on identitarian thought” and “now that the movement is in further retreat from its history of radicalism into a new form of post-liberationist privatisation, it is not surprising that gay men and lesbians are often willing to repudiate their own sexual culture and it’s world-making venues.”¹¹⁶

Castiglia and Reed link de-generational un-remembering with forms of neoliberal urban governance, particularly in New York City, which aimed to “clean up” the City and rezone districts where forms of public sexuality took place “in the name of health and tourism” and emerged from the “the systematic assault on sexualities that diverge from the interests of the privatised and heteronormative reproductive family.”¹¹⁷ It is noteworthy, in the context of protracted efforts in the post-AIDS era to spatially reconfigure sites of gay sexual culture in New York City in accordance with heteronormative mores, that another scene which features in the HBO adaptation but not the original stage play takes as its setting a physical location which is the subject of historical and contemporary battles over the meaning and ownership of public space.

The piers along the Hudson River waterfront on the west side of Manhattan hold particular significance for queer sexu-social culture. Robert Sember argues that the piers are an exemplary site for understanding how queer collective memory is inscribed by

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.50.

¹¹⁵ Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life*, p. 165.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.168.

¹¹⁷ Castiglia and Reed, p. 40.

and concerned with a relationship to space, and public space in particular. Sember refers to Samuel Delaney's experiences of the piers in the 1960s as a place of "libidinal saturation" where

thirty-five, a hundred all-but-strangers hugely ordered, highly social, attentive, silent, and grounded in a certain care, if not community. At those times, within those van-walled alleys, now between the trucks, now in the back of open loaders, cock passed from mouth to mouth to hand to ass to mouth without ever breaking contact with other flesh for more than seconds ... it was engrossing; it was exhausting; it was reassuring; and it was very human.¹¹⁸

For Sember, the incitement towards dissecting gay sexual culture in the era of AIDS has resulted in public spaces such as the piers constituting the sites in which "the impact of the AIDS crisis has been most intensely felt."¹¹⁹ The gentrification of the abandoned piers is taken by Michael Warner to signify one of the many ways in which the spaces of public sex have been recodified in the aftermath of AIDS. Warner notes that the piers, "a legendary meeting place for queers for decades, and more recently for youth of colour" have been "closed down, fenced off, subjected to curfew, and heavily patrolled, often by private security forces under contract to the state."¹²⁰ For Castiglia and Reed, the piers constitute a lost "vernacular [site] of queer memory" as their transformation from "a site for sunbathing and sex as well as a gathering place - and sometimes temporary home - associated with gay teenagers, transvestites and transsexuals" into a sanitised park in the 1990s rearticulated the meaning of the space.¹²¹ As such, the piers are understood by Sember as architectural spectres that "[straddle] the line that appears to have severed gay history into a time before and a time after the AIDS crisis."¹²² It is thus significant that the process of de-generational un-remembering is again undertaken on the backdrop of the piers in *The Normal Heart*. At the first fundraiser party for the Gay Men's Health Crisis, the jubilant disco dancing is interrupted for a speech from the organisation's president and followed by a rendition of 'The Man I Love' performed by the Gay Men's Choir. In this scene, coupled

¹¹⁸ Delaney in Robert Sember, 'In the Shadow of the Object: Sexual Memory in the AIDS Epidemic', *Space and Culture*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2003, p. 217.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.220.

¹²⁰ Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life*, pp. 154-5.

¹²¹ Castiglia and Reed, p. 84.

¹²² Sember, p. 221.

monogamy appears to be ascendant, as couples slow-dance in the centre of the dancefloor to the arrangement by the Choir, with single men - many represented as being in the later stages of AIDS - watch from the sidelines (Fig 2.5). As the music from the Choir continues non-diegetically, Ned and Felix step outside the venue and onto the piers, embracing as they walk past a group of trans women of colour (Fig 2.6).



Fig. 2.5: Couples slow-dance to the Gay Men's Choir in *The Normal Heart*.



Fig. 2.6: Ned and Felix walk past a group of trans women of colour on the piers in *The Normal Heart*.



Fig. 2.7: Reproducing heteronormativity and recoding historical queer space on the piers in *The Normal Heart*.



Fig. 2.8: Ned and Felix's union is emphatically celebrated by trans women on the piers in *The Normal Heart*.

Standing on the piers, which historically signified queer public sexuality and spatial nonnormativity, Ned drops to one knee in a physical gesture that typifies the marriage proposal (Fig 2.7) and asks Felix to move in to his apartment, to which Felix agrees, to the cheers of the women on the pier (Fig 2.8). By recodifying the piers in terms of homonormative domesticity and gay respectability, Murphy and Kramer are utilising the nostalgic frame to construct sanitised and safe collective memories linked to a historical queer site. Further, their romantic embrace, framed by decaying maritime buildings on the left and cheering trans women of colour on the right marginalised to the end of the pier (Fig 2.8), serves as a synecdoche of the centring of whiteness both within this particular narrative and in the broader cultural historiography of the AIDS crisis. As Jih-Fei Cheng notes, AIDS retrovisions, including narrative films such as *The Normal Heart*, *Dallas Buyers Club* and *Test* in addition to 2010s AIDS crisis

documentary films such as *We Were Here* and *How to Survive a Plague* articulate the cultural history of the North American AIDS crisis solely “through the lens of white male heroes.”¹²³ Charting the marginality of women and queers of colour in *How to Survive a Plague* and the implication that this absence (despite extensive documentation of the importance of women and queers of colour in early AIDS activism) illustrates their failure of survival, Cheng argues that the misrepresentation of the racial politics of the AIDS crisis in AIDS retrovisions are “egregious” and constitute a devaluing of these lives.¹²⁴ The spatiotemporal reimagining of queer urban environs in these films thus engages not only in processes of homonormativity but also in a racial recodification of historical spaces. As Sarah Schulman demonstrates, there is a crucial link by way of the “dynamics of death and replacement” in which the AIDS crisis in cities such as New York and San Francisco is imbricated with the hypergentrification of Black and Latinx neighbourhoods.¹²⁵ The urban spaces in *Test* are similarly engaged in a relationality of whiteness, queerness and notions of safety.

Due to *Test*’s minuscule budget, such vivid and expensive physical recreations of the San Francisco of the 1980s were not possible.¹²⁶ Whilst various exterior scenes are able to engender a level of surface realism due to the heritage protection of San Francisco neighbourhoods and landmarks (the film makes frequent use of shots of the Sutro Tower and exterior details of Edwardian rowhouses), the codification of public and private spaces within the film demonstrate the ways in which gay sexual intimacy has gentrified through and since the AIDS crisis. In *Test*, the boundaries between public space and private space are obfuscated by the designation and subsequent retreat of queer space, particularly in interior scenes. Space functions in *Test* as a parameter determining Frankie’s safety and comfort. When Frankie is navigating his own path through the city in interstitial sequences between scenes, he uses his Walkman as a buffer between himself and the wider world, which is represented as homophobic. In contrast, it is within the private confines of his bedroom, his apartment, lovers’

¹²³ Jih-Fei Cheng, 'How to Survive: AIDS and Its Afterlives in Popular Media', *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 1&2, 2016, p. 73.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.73-5.

¹²⁵ Schulman, p. 24.

¹²⁶ In an interview with Latino Review Media, director Chris Mason Johnson noted that the total budget, including festival marketing, was under \$200,000. Gig Patta, 'Exclusive Interview with Director Chris Mason Johnson for 'Test'', *Latino Review Media*, 10 June 2014, <http://lrmonline.com/news/exclusive-interview-with-director-chris-mason-johnson-for-test>.

apartments, inside a taxicab and inside a gay nightclub where queer space is produced, demarcating these spaces as safe. However, these private, homo-sexual/social spaces are also the spaces of increased surveillance in relation to behaviour and risk.

Within the confines and relative safety of these private spaces, Frankie is able to engage in dialogue with his lovers about the impact of the spectre of AIDS on gay sex, love and dating. Through these techniques of surveillance of the self, evaluating efficacy against the opinion of others, and then imbibing these changed behaviours and subjectivities into himself through self-discipline, the private spaces of sex in *Test* are revealed to be zones in which external forces of governmentality around sexual health and behaviour are monitored and evaluated, in contrast to the spaces of anonymous gay public sexual cultures which are rendered dangerous, depressing and anachronistic. In a scene following Frankie's first on-stage performance with the company, Todd invites Frankie to take MDMA with him, and they wander through a dark park. At one point, as they are hidden behind some bushes, they notice an elderly man dressed in a dapper suit and walking with a campy gait, cruising in the park. As Frankie's emotional state is influenced by the MDMA, he is highly affected by this man, whispering to Todd "he came out all this way and dressed himself up so he could find someone". This is particularly poignant for two reasons. First, it is associating public cruising behaviour with an older generation, suggesting that either this element of gay male sexual culture has been taken away from Frankie's generation, or that it represents the form of sexual 'irresponsibility' outlined by Castiglia and Reed. Frankie's reaction to witnessing this older man publicly cruising for sex is one of pity and sympathy, consistent with the view that these behaviours are the result of an earlier, more homophobic era in which gay sex could not be domesticated. Second, it associates public space, and in particular, public sex, with notions of irresponsibility, danger and risk. As such, it articulates a view that earlier forms of public gay male sexuality are both a product of a homophobic past and a cause of the AIDS crisis, and are not commensurate with emergent discourses of sexual health which promise to grant sexual citizenship to gay men so long as they modify their sexual behaviour to fit within normative, domestic, private, monogamous, heteronormative configurations.

As we can see from the codifications of public and private space and public and private sex in the nostalgic frames of *The Normal Heart* and *Test*, the gentrification of

the gay male sexual subject¹²⁷ is posited as a political strategy for the present in order to avoid the harms and dangers experienced in the past.

Biopolitics in Reflective Retrovisions: Visual Ascesis

Thus far, I have accounted for the ways in which *Test* and *The Normal Heart* are productive of a retrovisual optic through drawing on a nostalgic gaze, making use of retro material objects and music to trigger prosthetic memory, and recodifying space concomitant with neoliberal urban renewal and (private) sexual citizenship. The films' use of temporality and spatiality invoke a sensuous prosthetic memory which also engages in de-generational un-remembering, positing normativity and monogamy as prophylactics to preserve gay health and prosperity. At the level of biopolitics, these films adopt markedly different approaches to the representation of AIDS. In *The Normal Heart*, the visual ascesis of HIV in the 'post-AIDS' era is illuminated through the graphic and horrific representation of Kaposi's sarcoma lesions as the ultimate indexical sign of AIDS. Whereas the filmic representation of HIV in the 'post-AIDS' era is defined by a visual ascesis of the corporeal signifiers of disease in place of the biometric optic of the HIV antibody test and, subsequently, the viral load test,¹²⁸ AIDS retrovisions resuscitate the indexes of the visual spectacle of AIDS through the use of excessive visual signifiers. There is one opportunistic infection associated with AIDS that occupies the position of primary indexical signifier: Kaposi's sarcoma. A rare cancer caused by a virus, Kaposi's sarcoma (KS) results in dark, spotty lesions on the face and body and was relatively obscure prior to the early 1980s, when its discovery in groups of gay men in urban centres of North America was the prompt leading to the

¹²⁷ Sarah Schulman charts the relationship between the AIDS crisis and urban renewal in *Gentrification of the Mind* (2012), noting that the urban locales most affected by the AIDS crisis are similarly the spaces that have experienced the most profound gentrification (2012, p.23), and this goes for San Francisco as well as New York City. Schulman suggests that her hypothesis should be understood as "not a conspiracy, but simply a tragic example of historical coincidence that in the middle of this process of converting low-income housing into housing for the wealthy, in 1981 to be precise, the AIDS epidemic began." (pp.25-6). Schulman notes that in the early years of the crisis, roommates or same-sex partners were not able to inherit leases from people who had died of AIDS, meaning that the AIDS crisis increased the number of evictions and empty apartments, and "for every leaseholder who died of AIDS, an apartment went to market rate." (p.38).

¹²⁸ Kane Race, 'The Undetectable Crisis: Changing Technologies of Risk', *Sexualities*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2001.

discovery of AIDS in 1981. The history of KS lesions as a visual signifier for AIDS in screen culture begins with the narrative of the most successful Hollywood film to deal with HIV/AIDS, *Philadelphia*, where the visual signification of the lesions exists as the major narrative element, being the reason why Andrew Beckett is fired from his job at the law firm. In *The Normal Heart*, the visual excess of AIDS is characterised by the reliance on the spectacle of KS lesions, underscoring the contemporary visual ascesis of HIV in an era of “undetectability” and a biometric optic of seropositivity that renders HIV invisible to the naked eye. The utilisation of the trope of the AIDS-inflicted body in *The Normal Heart* can be understood in the same terms as the representation of the wounded national body in the visual language of the American war film. In contrast, *Test* is bereft of these forms of visceral visual articulation of AIDS, opting instead for an elucidation of the corporeal impact of AIDS and HIV through mediations on the body of the dancer in the time of AIDS.

Noting that the historical context of AIDS’ emergence in the United States in the late 1970s contributed to the mischaracterisation of AIDS “not as a viral disease, such as Hepatitis B, but as a sexually transmitted disease, such as syphilis,” Sander L. Gilman traces the history of the iconography of syphilis from its first visual representation in a German broadside in 1496 through to nineteenth century portrayals of syphilitic women as dangerous seductresses.¹²⁹ Gilman argues that the introduction of antibiotics as a treatment for syphilis and other STIs from the 1940s “left our culture with a series of images of mortally infected and infecting people suffering a morally repugnant disease - without a sufficiently powerful disease to function as the referent of these images.”¹³⁰ The referential void was quickly occupied with the emergence of AIDS in the 1980s, when images of people with AIDS in the media were those of gay men, “both victim and cause of his own pollution.”¹³¹ For Gilman, the depiction of the gay male AIDS sufferer conflates the two forms of iconography of the syphilitic: the “male sufferer” and “the female source of suffering” in a powerful and graphic representation through which the boundary between the immune and the implicated is drawn. Similarly, Gilman proposes that, had AIDS first been associated with another

¹²⁹ Sander L. Gilman, 'AIDS and Syphilis: the Iconography of Disease', *October*, vol. 43, 1987, p. 90.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.98.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.99.

‘risk group’, such as haemophiliacs or IV drug users, the iconography of AIDS would have been markedly different: “among the latter it would have been seen as an iatrogenic illness, not the fault of the patient but of the system ... among IV drug users, AIDS would still have been stigmatised as a disease of a marginal group, but it would have been seen as a product of a sociopathic act associated with a specific class and race, and it would, therefore, be limited in its perceived focus.”¹³² Key to the iconography of AIDS body in screen culture is its monstrous representation, anchored by the indexicality offered by the purplish lesions of the opportunistic infection of Kaposi's sarcoma. KS lesions mark the body as an “AIDS body”¹³³ in a definite manner, and indexically signify their host as a person-with-AIDS and therefore marked by sexual deviance. It is in this sense that Kaposi's sarcoma is characterised by Deborah Lupton as a “moral lesion,” the indexical signifier of the HIV infection that intervenes between the smiling, healthy body of the ‘before’ picture and the “emaciated, defeated, unsmiling person facing death” in the ‘after’ picture.¹³⁴ In *The Normal Heart*, KS functions as a consistent visual signifier of AIDS, culminating in a disturbing sequence featuring Ned's lover Felix on a subway train. The first appearance of KS as AIDS signifier in the film is when Ned visits Dr. Emma Brookner at her facility in the hospital and sees his friend Sanford in a quarantined hospital bed, his hand, face and body ravaged with KS lesions and his mind afflicted by Alzheimers. As Dr. Brookner takes his hand and says “how are we doing, soldier?” Ned is taken aback by the dilapidated condition of the facilities and the degradation of his friend's health. The second appearance of KS lesions is, as previously described, on the face of a model during a fashion runway. By this point, KS has emerged as a recognisable visual signifier of AIDS, and the model's main concern is that of recognition in the crowd as a PWA by way of identification through the KS lesion. In the fundraiser scene, the bodies of healthy dancing men are contrasted with emaciated, dying bodies covered in lesions. Finally, when Felix begins to fall ill, it is the KS lesion on his foot that raises his attention to his seropositivity, and from here, Felix's lesions factor as a visual barometer of the progression of his illness. Stepping onto a subway car *en route* to an appointment with Brookner, and with a visible lesion on his emaciated face, Felix is recognised as

¹³² Ibid., p.104.

¹³³ Deborah Lupton, 'The Feminine ‘AIDS Body’ in Television Drama: People With HIV/AIDS on Television', *Media International Australia*, vol. 80, no. 1, 1996, p. 103.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

marked by a woman sitting opposite. As the train begins to move and the subway car lights start to flicker, Felix notices another man, in a later stage of illness, sitting nearby. In the oscillation between darkness, red light and full light as the lights in the car flicker, close frame shots of each of the men's marked and hollowed faces are interspersed, resulting in a low-fi horror aesthetic that likens the men's faces to disease-ridden skeletons. Accounting for the resilience of the trope of the 'AIDS carrier' as monstrous Other, Peter Redman argues that it is crucial to recognise that "venerealised accounts of HIV are located firmly within the conventions of the horror genre" in order to explain how these accounts receive "popular purchase."¹³⁵ For Redman, who draws on Barbara Creed's articulation that the horror genre is fundamentally concerned with the abject as the disturbance of boundaries and meaning, the construction of the "AIDS carrier" as monstrous is in part accounted for by the response of heterosexual masculinity to the homosexual threat of the collapse of the boundary between Self and Other induced by gay anal sex.¹³⁶ By visually invoking the history of the construction of PWAs as "monstrous Others," *The Normal Heart* is mobilising the affective potential of the AIDS-afflicted body as a visual spectacle. Furthermore, the mobilisation of images of visually spectacular disease and of corporeal degradation to "otherwise healthy young male" bodies through a nostalgic frame in order to situate a narrative in relation intergenerational trauma is strikingly reminiscent of the nostalgic war film genre. Taken in addition to the articulation of Ned Weeks' character in the film and the play, it is not difficult to see how *The Normal Heart* might have much in common with *Saving Private Ryan*.

Biopolitics in Reflective Retrovisions: The Body of the Dancer in the Time of AIDS

Rather than impede the audience with the spectacle of 'full-blown' AIDS, in *Test* Chris Mason Johnson affectively addresses the structures of feeling in the crisis through subtle sequences that intimate the anxieties of an uncertain time. In one scene, as Frankie is walking home, he passes a poster warning people of one of the main visual corporeal symptoms of AIDS, the purple discolouration and bumps indicating Kaposi's

¹³⁵ Peter Redman, 'Invasion of the Monstrous Others: Heterosexual Masculinities, the 'AIDS Carrier' and the Horror Genre', in Deborah Lynn Steinberg, Debbie Epstein, and Richard Johnson (eds), *Border Patrols: Policing the Boundaries of Heterosexuality*, London, Cassell, 1997, p. 108.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.110.

sarcoma. Frankie immediately returns home and closely inspects his body in the mirror, checking every mole, interrupted only by the realisation that a neighbour is watching through the window. Constituting a sequence of closely-framed shots of Frankie's body both standing in front of the mirror, and reflected on the surface of the mirror, this scene eloquently articulates a sense of corporeal anxiety that is acutely heightened in the context of the character's psyche and occupation as a professional dancer. Further, it is within the private, safe, and queer space of Frankie's apartment that he is able to use the mirror as a tool for self-reflection and assessment, a space that is broken by the realisation of another's gaze inside.

Test's position within the genre of the AIDS film is particularly interesting given that, in contrast to overwhelming majority of films for which HIV/AIDS occupies the driving force of the narrative, the film is bereft of the visual spectacle of AIDS, and none of the main characters in the film are depicted as either HIV positive or 'afflicted' with obvious AIDS-defining symptoms. By resituating the nostalgic gaze onto moments of self-reflection and anxious affect in the protagonist Frankie, *Test* recasts the mediation of AIDS histories and produces an embodied affect in the position of the "at risk" seronegative in an era of great uncertainty. However, there is one narrative element in which the corporeal effects of the AIDS crisis are brought into focus by addressing the body of the dancer. Returning to the dressing room early prior to the final performance to leave a note welcoming the return of the dancer for whom he was replacing, Frankie interrupts another gay male dancer, Tommy, who was alone in the dressing room. In an echo of the earlier scene in which Frankie's assessment of his own body in the mirror is interrupted by the gaze of another, Frankie's entrance into the dressing room stunts Tommy, who was carefully assessing the skin on his torso. Frankie wishes Tommy good luck for the performance, and, noticing Tommy's dispirited demeanour, asks him whether he is okay, to which he replies that he is "just tired." Seeming annoyed that Frankie has interrupted his private sanctum in the shared dressing room, once Frankie exits, he continues to assess himself in the mirror, applying makeup to his face in a frustrated manner, searching his reflection for solace. What is accomplished in this brief scene is a meditation on the self-reflexivity of the embodied self after what is assumed to be a positive HIV diagnosis in light of the new test. Rather than drawing on visual tropes of the 'afflicted' body in decay, Johnson presents a more nuanced account of the private emotionality of the person with HIV at a particular

historical juncture where the recently introduced technologies of biometrics are able to render the subject's corporeal matter as intelligible.

Most notable in terms of the narrative is the chronological placement of this scene and its articulation as a moment of fractured visual truth that complicates the totalising rationality of the test itself. This scene directly follows on from Frankie's eventual decision to see the doctor and take the new HIV test, and precedes a scene in which Frankie receives a message on his answering machine from occasional love interest Walt informing him that Walt has tested positive and is leaving the city. As Walt and Frankie had condomless sex on their first liaison, with the introduction of this new information, Frankie's anxiety about the possibility of a positive test result reaches a crescendo, and he once more searches his body for visual signs that might indicate positivity, closely examining his moles in the mirror in his apartment. Swallowing a Valium to calm down, he retreats to his bed. In the following scene, Frankie is back in the doctor's office, crying as he receives his positive HIV diagnosis from the doctor; a quick cut then returns us to Frankie violently waking from a sleep to reveal that the positive result was Frankie's nightmare. Frankie rises and tries to turn his Walkman on but the batteries are dead; he searches for new batteries to no avail, and then makes his way on public transport to the clinic, without the insulation of his personal music as a retreat. In contrast to earlier scenes in which Frankie is navigating public space but is sufficiently distanced from the public through use of his Walkman, Frankie's journey to the doctor's office is this time overwhelmed by the abrasive sounds of the city, as noisy traffic, clanking streetcars and ringing telephones both heighten Frankie's connection to the outside world and enhance an affective response in the viewer that mirrors the nervous tension of Frankie's facial expressions. At the doctor's surgery, he flicks through magazines and reaches the Newsweek magazine from August 12, 1985, with a headline of 'AIDS' in bold lettering and Rock Hudson's face on the front cover. Frankie immediately throws the other magazines back on top of the pile as if to wish Rock Hudson away. Finally, Frankie enters the doctor's office with the exact same *mise-en-scene* and shot-countershot camera position as his fevered dream, but this time is informed of a negative HIV result, and an anti-climactic narrative closure has finally come. Throughout this sequence of scenes, the tensions between corporeal, emotional, embodied and biometric truth are brought into focus. By eschewing the conventions of the visual representation of HIV and AIDS - particularly the visual representation of

AIDS during the AIDS crisis years - in favour of scenes which alternate between modes of suggestiveness and ambiguity, Johnson achieves an affective mode of nostalgic reception which navigates the emotional interiority of the protagonist as a window into developing an understanding of the fraught relationship between visual signifiers of disease and biometric proof at a time when neither were certain. The scene with Tommy in the dressing room, with its chronological placement in the narrative coming after Frankie's test but prior to the revelation of Walt's positive status, thus represents a moment in which the viewer has been presented with narrative truth through non-verbal diegesis bereft of the conventional AIDS film visual signifiers of the 'afflicted' body of the person with HIV. As such, this subtle intimation of Tommy's HIV status - an intimation to which Frankie remains naive - calls into question the legitimacy of *seeing* AIDS through visual signifiers on the body. The pertinence of this questioning is subsequently emphasised by the legitimated biometric optic which first attests to, and then negates, Frankie's HIV status. The biometric optic's ability to convey biomedical truth, whilst at first being destabilised, is eventually reified following Frankie's (correct) negative result. However, it is also through the gay male body's signification as harbouring the potential for HIV infection - irrespective of its visual health or appearance - and the uncertainty over the fluids within this body that are drawn into focus in *Test*.

In *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic*, David Gere discusses a scene from the film *Alive and Kicking* (dir. Nancy Meckler, 1996), in which the main protagonist Tonio, a HIV-positive gay dancer, is rehearsing with his lesbian friend and colleague Millie. Tonio is sweating profusely and his sweat is landing on Millie's body; Gere notes that "all at once, and without warning, Millie loses control of her emotions and runs from the studio, screaming angrily ... she is furious at him for exposing her to his infectious fluid-producing body."¹³⁷ Although Millie is presumed to know and understand that Tonio's sweat is benign, the scene demonstrates both the irrationality invoked by abject fear, and also "the transformation of the dance studio - a place for ritual action and rigorous, almost sacred training - into a site where the signification of AIDS could not be avoided, even in the thought processes of the most sympathetic and

¹³⁷ David Gere, *How to Make Dances in an Epidemic: Tracking Choreography in the Age of AIDS*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, p. 42.

thoroughly informed colleagues.”¹³⁸ The logic of this scene is recreated in the first dance sequence in *Test*. The whole company are rehearsing in the dance studio in male-female pairs. Todd is shirtless, his body moist with sweat. His partner, Molly, is shown eyeing his sweaty body with concern during their dance; when he lifts her and then places her on the ground with him on top, a single droplet of Todd’s sweat lands on Molly’s face and she immediately flinches and pulls back. Cutting the rehearsal sequence abruptly short, the choreographer enquires as to what happened:

MOLLY:	Can you dry off a little?
TODD:	Yeah, sure
MOLLY:	[to the choreographer] He said he has a cold
TODD:	[interjecting] I’m fine!

Gere argues that the conflation of the male dancer with homosexuality (and, within the logic of the AIDS crisis years, thus also with AIDS) means that within the space of the dance studio, “any fluid exuded from the body is capable of being conflated with AIDS infection” and further that “the source of those aberrant body fluids, the fluid body itself, becomes a sign for contagious corporeality.”¹³⁹ As Todd dries off and covers his body with a T-shirt, the scene cuts to a close shot of Frankie’s face, one of many affective shots throughout the course of the film that work towards visualising Frankie’s anxiety-ridden disposition. Through the subtlety of the dialogue and performance, the knowing audience, through Frankie, understands the unspoken implications. In the relative privacy of the locker room, another gay male dancer whispers to Frankie that the same thing occurred at another dance company: “people didn’t want to touch Malcolm. You know, Malcolm?” Again, the unspoken implication, mutually understood by Frankie and his interlocutor, is that Malcolm had AIDS. Frankie responds in a whisper, “but you can’t get it from sweat, can you?” The other dancer says that another female dancer in the company, Jennifer, has now refused to dine in the Castro, the gay neighbourhood in San Francisco, worried that “it might be like hepatitis... in the food.” This sequence illustrates the environment of fear in the midst of a broad lack of knowledge about AIDS in the early years of the crisis. It also demonstrates that the fear of the abject, leaky gay male body extends not only to direct

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.43.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

transmission of bodily fluids but to indirect physical proximity; a whole neighbourhood designated as an infectious site.

Conclusion

As the four AIDS retrovisions analysed in this chapter demonstrate, the collective history of the AIDS crisis stands as a promising cultural artefact, drawing a range of cultural and political actors to engage, reinterpret and reimagine this period in history. As a phenomenon in contemporary screen culture and as the wholly predominant genre of HIV/AIDS screen media in the past decade, the emergence and persistence of the nostalgic mode in retelling the history of the AIDS crisis is illustrative of the temporal disjuncture induced by the shift from epidemic to endemic epochs. In the case of *Love For Life*, the restorative nostalgic mode serves as a vehicle for the public institutions in the PRC who have been imbricated in producing the conditions for, and subsequently attempting to cover up, the devastating impact of the AIDS crisis in its particular historical modalities in mainland China, a historical narrative which markedly differs from the more recognisable history of the AIDS crisis in North America. Similarly, by drawing on and then recasting the story of Ron Woodruff as a form of cowboy Western to consistently reiterate his heteromascularity and homophobia, and by resituating the politics of AIDS treatment activism in terms that align with libertarian individualist values and mistrust of the welfare state whilst the United States was in the process of introducing huge reforms to healthcare provision, the filmmakers of *Dallas Buyers Club* demonstrate the ways in which events of the past are reinterpreted through the politics of the present. In both instances, mainstream films were utilised as vehicles to exonerate blame from institutions, politics and publics whose influence in the AIDS crisis years contributed to the deaths of millions of people. In contrast, the reflective nostalgic mode of *The Normal Heart* and *Test* demonstrates the intergenerational pull towards the affective and embodied engagement with a collective cultural past stored in the lived memories of previous generations. Whilst *The Normal Heart*'s tone can tend towards that of a war epic in which a younger generation genuflects to pay respect to the valiant generals of a more politically engaged and vigorous past, and also evinces some of the forms of political mobilisation of the

restorative mode through its convenient divergences from the original play, its use of a range of formal techniques to engender the triggering of memory practices in the audience highlights the ways in which shared cultural memories of the AIDS crisis are important for the self-awareness of contemporary gay culture. Similarly, by exploring structures of feeling during the AIDS crisis without explicitly drawing on the *clichés* of visual spectacle associated with the AIDS film, in *Test* we are brought into an imagining of the subjectivity of gay life at the height of the crisis years.

The existence of the AIDS retrovision as a genre demonstrates how intergenerational memories are mobilised in the service of contemporary gay and HIV politics in China and North America. However, as the primary contemporary media dealing with HIV/AIDS onscreen, the AIDS retrovision has a tendency to suggest that the AIDS crisis was an historical event which occurred only in the past. Despite recent proclamations that AIDS crisis is ‘over’ in the West, due to pharmaceutical interventions such as PrEP and TasP, there remain many millions of people living with HIV and AIDS, concentrated in the Global South. As I demonstrate in the following chapter, the mobilisation of representations of ‘global AIDS’ and the deployment of a form of HIV cosmopolitanism in screen-mediated fictions that are variably for, about, by, and of the Global South point to the solidification of the borders and boundaries pertaining to HIV whereby the sacrifices and conditions in which poor countries are expected to address HIV as a ‘global issue’ demonstrate the ways in which some bodies are granted immunity whilst others are deemed bare life.

Chapter Three

Borderlines: Culpable Bodies and Violent Cartographies in Global HIV/AIDS Media

In the previous chapter, I addressed the ways in which contemporary screen-mediated representations of the AIDS crisis years, in their various localised contexts, have been reinterpreted through a nostalgic gaze. Drawing on the conceptualisation of nostalgia by the late Svetlana Boym, I demonstrated how recent screen fiction depicting HIV/AIDS histories can be apportioned into two camps: *restorative* nostalgia, which seeks to return to an imagined prelapsarian past through the reconstruction of grand histories and the control of historical representation, and *reflective* nostalgia, which prefers to dwell in the subjective and personal meaning of history in the present moment. Both modalities of the AIDS retrovision share in common a concern with the temporal dissonance between epochs. They circumscribe historical eras with finitude, discursively producing a contained imaginary of an AIDS crisis era, which is

represented as politically dense, and a ‘post-crisis’ era which is represented through the paradox of ‘undetectability’ and articulated as politically sparse. What these discursive historicities neglect, however, are the ways in which the boundaries of epidemic and endemic temporality are not merely constituted in terms of linear time but are fundamentally structured in terms of geopolitics.

The geopolitical delineations between the AIDS retrovisions addressing the American AIDS crisis (*The Dallas Buyers Club*, *Test*, *The Normal Heart*) and the Chinese AIDS crisis (*Love For Life*), for example, demonstrate the ways in which a subject’s temporal location *in addition* to their spatial location determines both their vulnerability to the virus and the management of their body through either thanatopolitical or biopolitical regimes of governance. Whereas the ‘Protease Moment’ signalled a massive temporal distinction in the Global North which clearly delineated a pre- and post- antiretroviral modality, this shift is always contingent on extant geopolitical factors determining precisely which bodies are rendered through a post-crisis paradigm and which bodies are cast as bare life. The disjuncture between endemic and epidemic eras of HIV/AIDS is thus a disjuncture of territoriality in addition to a disjuncture of temporality.

It is with this in mind that I turn, in this chapter, to screen texts which undertake the work of producing contemporary, ‘global’ HIV/AIDS imaginaries. Contextualising these works in relation to spatialised designation of HIV and AIDS by various supranational authorities and the transnational processes through which they are imagined, funded and produced, this chapter traces the conceptualisation of the ‘global AIDS crisis’ through two very different case studies. Whilst their contexts of production and distribution and their narrative techniques illustrate sharp contrasts, they both ultimately work to interpellate a neoliberal subjectivity which emphasises individual actions rather than “cartographic violence”¹ as the cause and solution to the AIDS crisis at a global level.

Canadian director Thom Fitzgerald’s triptych *3 Needles* (2005) presents three contained narratives with an overarching narration bespeaking their interconnectivity *vis-à-vis* the global AIDS crisis. Loosely following the generic formation of the ‘global

¹ Shapiro, ‘The New Violent Cartography’.

network film'² *3 Needles* enunciates the imagined geopolitical specificities of the AIDS crisis between peasants in rural China, porn actors in Canada, and plantation workers in South Africa. Despite the project's intentions through its marketing and distribution as a global narrative, its orientalist depictions of the Chinese and South African experiences of the virus and its unwitting parallels with problematic spatialised narratives culminate in a film which produces an imaginary of culpable bodies, aligning *3 Needles* with colonialist depictions of a disease-ridden and illness-prone Global South.

In contrast, MTV Base's education-entertainment television franchise *Shuga* (2009-2017) draws extensively on the methodologies of Miguel Sabido to incorporate health messaging about HIV and AIDS into a popular youth-oriented television fiction in order to influence public health outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, it is crucial to assess the ways in which supranationally-funded and produced content operates as a biopolitical discourse in relation to national domestic policies concerning HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment in these nations. What emerges from the specificities in HIV/AIDS cultural production between low- and middle-income countries and high-income countries are the ways in which certain biopolitical discourses afford some bodies access to forms of pleasure whereas other bodies are managed through governmentality to negate pleasure in response to the same threat.

Chapter Outline

In the following section, I provide an account of the supranational discourses which have carved the world into designated 'patterns' of AIDS in order to demonstrate the conceptual underpinnings of a 'global' AIDS imaginary. The geopolitical delineation of these 'patterns' fundamentally reveal themselves to be tainted with colonial discourses, and constitute one element of the cartographic violence which continues to shape the divergent global lived experiences of HIV and AIDS. After laying this foundation, the chapter splits into two sections. The first addresses *3 Needles*, beginning with a contextualisation of the generic formulations of the global network film, which loosely structures the film, and the concept of the global citizen, who constitutes the film's target audience. I then dissect the film's engagement with

² Neil Narine, 'Global Trauma and the Cinematic Network Society', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2010.

notions of temporality by addressing the articulation of racialised Otherness and the ‘backwardness’ of ‘traditional’ societies in the Chinese and African segments of the film. Following this, I address the use of space in the film as a signifier for backwardness and space’s relationship to notions of modernity. Finally, I chart the ways in which bodies and bodily integrity are seen in the film as geopolitically relative, comparing the viral transmission routes in the Chinese, African and Canadian segments of the film and how these correspond with a peculiarly colonialist representation of neoliberal subjectivity. The second section of this chapter addresses MTV’s *Shuga* franchise. I similarly begin by situating the series in its production and distribution context, providing an outline of the history and practice of the entertainment-education (EE) methodology and its pedagogical aims. I address a range of narratives across the universe of *Shuga*, *ShugaNaija* and *Shuga: Down South*, and illustrate the ways in which HIV/AIDS in the specific regional contexts of the programme is constituted in relation to space, biopolitics, and temporality. At the level of territory, I analyse the ways in which a pan-African modernity is writ large on a backdrop of the cities of Nairobi, Lagos and Johannesburg, and how uneven development and neoliberal urban planning has produced zones of inclusion and exclusion within these African metropolises. Further, I address the ways in which the rural/urban divide in the program situates these spatial divides in proximity to transmission and immunity. At the level of biopolitics, I analyse the representation of ‘transactional sex’ throughout the programme, and address the specific public health messages that are articulated in the program in relation to the notion of the “neoliberal sexual actor” and the transfer of responsibility for public health from the public to the private realm. Finally, I return to the spectre of ‘backwardness’ by addressing the complicated position of depictions of homosexuality in the franchise, situating my analysis in relation to Mark Epprecht’s work on the conceptualisation of homo/heterosexuality in Africa.

In the case of the global network film *3 Needles*, I argue that the triptych structure of the film and its temporal semantics produces a colonial imaginary in which HIV/AIDS is on the one hand understood as a global pandemic and on the other tied to racialised and individualised practices. Similarly, in the case of the *Shuga* franchise, I argue that the spatio-temporal delineation of zones of risk and immunity coincide with the discursive construction of a neoliberal subjectivity and a pan-African modernity in which pleasure and promiscuity must be curtailed. As a whole, the construction of the

Global South within the Euro-American imaginary produces a geocorpography of HIV in which certain geopolitically-located bodies are afforded access to pleasures whilst others are subject to behavioural modification.

Three Patterns

As discussed in Chapter One, the global response to the AIDS crisis remains under the influence of a “deeply spatial understanding of disease” despite the fact that the virus which causes it is so often blind to the sanctity of sovereign borders and geopolitical specificities in a globally interconnected world.³ As Cindy Patton notes in *Globalising AIDS*, the first supranational responses to the AIDS crisis were largely coordinated along geospatial divisions, despite significant contradictions and disparities between nations as a result of geopolitical and colonial histories. Patton cogently illustrates the complication inherent in the regional groupings of the World Health Organisation in designating AIDS along geospatial lines, addressing the fact that Australia and New Zealand were included in the ‘Western Pacific’ region alongside all Pacific Island nations, East Asian nations and some South East Asian nations:

The ambivalent cultural and economic relationship between Australia and its regional siblings was encapsulated in a late-1980s safe-sex campaign: Apparently directed towards Anglo-Australian travellers, one ad featured a [Qantas] jet sporting a condom, though it was uncertain whether such prophylaxis would contain the advanced epidemic within Australia or prevent tourists from bringing more back from elsewhere.⁴

In contrast to the relatively arbitrary grouping of the ‘Western Pacific Region’, in which the contexts, histories and demographics of the constituent nations are vastly heterogenous and therefore the benefits of grouping them together questionable, the ‘Eastern Mediterranean’ region encapsulates a cultural and religious grouping more than a specific geopolitical area, covering the Arabian peninsula, most of continental Western Asia, most of the Maghreb, Somalia, and most of the Middle East (with the notable exception of Israel, which is included in the European region). In this case, the grouping is a collection of nations in which Islam is the main (or state) religion. The

³ Patton, p. 51.

⁴ Ibid., p.57.

misplaced utility of these regional mappings have led to their persistence in supranational discourses. As Patton notes:

like the very geology underlying the shifting details of geography, changes in national territories after colonialism have never forced the remapping of WHO regions. Rarely have countries been reassigned, nor have the regions been reconceptualised to meet changes in the health status or the needs of the countries' citizenry.⁵

However, there was a concerted effort to institutionalise a shift away from a spatially-ordered delineation of the AIDS pandemic towards a temporally-ordered delineation, a shift which aligned with the movement away from 'tropical thinking' to 'epidemiological thinking', recasting disease in terms of sociopolitical behaviours in which disease is proper to nodes and practices rather than an imaginary in which disease is proper to a place.

In 1986, the American epidemiologist Jonathan Mann founded the WHO's Global Programme for AIDS. Under his direction, the nomenclature in supranational AIDS discourse shifted from the WHO geopolitical regional groupings, and was replaced with 'patterns' which were temporally and epidemiologically conceived, based on the order in which AIDS was identified in that area and the human behaviours that supposedly characterised its dissemination. Pattern One designated places in which the first AIDS cases were identified among gay men. Pattern Two, which is often referred to as 'African AIDS', designates places where heterosexual intercourse is assumed to be the method of transmission, and thus where the epidemic is considered to be 'generalised'. Pattern Three is defined "through the absence of cases," where AIDS is imagined to have "arrived late".⁶ There are notable benefits to drawing on epidemiological and behavioural factors when approaching global disease in contrast to relying on arbitrary geopolitical delineations. Configuring the global AIDS crisis in terms of 'patterns' rather than geography addresses the disparate conditions resulting from colonial legacies which enable diseases to impact populations in diverse ways. It makes little sense, for example, to address HIV/AIDS in Australia - a high-income settler-colonial state which historically pivoted towards Britain and, since the 1950s, the United States - in the same way as the crisis needs to be addressed in Australia's

⁵ Ibid., p.58.

⁶ Ibid., p.60.

geographically closest neighbour and former colony, Papua New Guinea, a low-income country with a generalised epidemic and significant infrastructural deficits which make healthcare provision exceedingly difficult. Thus, in Australia, particularly in urban centres, the HIV epidemic is contiguous with Pattern One, similar to the United States and Western Europe, whereas Papua New Guinea aligns with Pattern Two, similar to Sub-Saharan Africa. However, as Patton notes, when the GPA's patterns lost their distinctiveness or the data failed to support the theses, "these patterns were grafted back into geopolitical stereotypes" and thus "instead of recognising the plasticity of human and sexual behaviour, the patterns used cultural stereotypes to explain the variations away."⁷ As such, the coexistence of an administrative delineation of the globe by the World Health Organisation along geopolitical and colonial lines and an epidemiological delineation of the globe based on behaviour and transmission routes is, for Patton, "like an Escher drawing: a template that allows a plethora of more-detailed versions of the story to transmute one into another."⁸ As the behavioural assumptions that defined the AIDS 'patterns' were subsequently tied to geopolitical regions, the stereotypes about these regions became set in ways that permanently delimited the options available for approaching, understanding and containing the HIV pandemic, the results of which are still apparent. Thus, in Pattern One regions, the focus on homosexuals, injecting-drug users and sex workers has resulted in a cultural blindness towards transmissions that do not fit these behavioural patterns, such as high rates of HIV transmission in poor urban black and latino populations in the United States, resulting in a pervasive racist logic cloaked in scientific language that suggests that these populations are predisposed to 'African AIDS'; similarly, the mobilisation of these behavioural logics in Sub-Saharan Africa have led to the insistence by some African leaders that homosexuality is a product of the West and a legacy of colonialism, and therefore AIDS policy in Africa should not consider the possibilities of MSM transmission. This view is further supported by the notion that AIDS 'came late' to Asia with the implication that it was an import of Western homosexual men via the commercial sex tourism trade in Thailand, limiting HIV prevention messaging and treatment to these narrow frames. In the supranational context, the World Health Organisation is particularly mired, as Patton notes, "because of its disjunct position, both *of* and *over* nations, the WHO is the most

⁷ Ibid., p.59.

⁸ Ibid., p.62.

visible location of a policy machine in which the teeth on the gears do not match, and so the gears slip as they turn.”⁹

John Nguyet Erni notes that the designation of Pattern Three, or ‘Asian AIDS’ as that in which AIDS has ‘arrived late’ functions to both produce a “mundane sort of spatial and temporal order to the global epidemic” in addition to signalling “the shift from homosexual to heterosexual AIDS.”¹⁰ The WHO’s classification of this pattern, defined by an purported absence of HIV, also led to a delayed response to the threat of HIV/AIDS in the region. Erni goes on to note that

the rigid division of geographical regions as categories of temporal zones on one hand and sexual categories on the other provides with a basis for considering how “Asian AIDS” has been constructed. The complex human sexual practices, the sexual-microbial interaction, and the vectorial logic used by officials in Geneva and Atlanta to delineate the pattern of the spread of the virus around the globe are what gives shape to any localised epidemic in any given nation or region.¹¹

In this sense, the way in which a disease impacts on a specific localised community is dependent on the combination of a number of factors, including environmental and biological factors in addition to national domestic discourses and extranational discourses which imagine ‘patterns’ of transmission that are somehow conveniently linked to contemporary geopolitical realities in these locales.

As Patton demonstrates, by as early as 1986, the media and the scientific community in the global north had “created a linguistic distinction between ‘AIDS’ and ‘African AIDS’” which correlates with the WHO’s epidemiologically-determined and thinly-veiled cartography of the three ‘patterns’ of AIDS.¹² As Patton argues, Pattern One, which describes an epidemic whereby homosexuality, drug use and sex work are the primary conduits of the virus, is “racially coded as ‘white’” and the presumed absence of homosexuality in black communities in the United States led researchers and policymakers to suggest that the “inner urban pockets” of the cities of the United States

⁹ Ibid., p.29.

¹⁰ Erni, 'Epidemic Imaginary: Performing Global Figurations of “Third World AIDS”', p. 431.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Cindy Patton, 'From Nation to Family: Containing African AIDS', in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (eds), *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, New York, Routledge, 1993.

represented zones of Pattern Two, or “African AIDS.”¹³ Similar incongruities are apparent in the designation of the Caribbean as Pattern Two and the rest of Latin America as Pattern One whereby it would appear that the key difference between the two is to be found in terms of racial classification. The role of racial codification in the segregation of these patterns is also evident in Pattern Three, or ‘Asian AIDS’, which Patton notes is configured around the notion of “postcolonial sex tourism and international bloodbanking,” illustrating how the emergence of HIV is conceptually tethered to ‘modernisation’ in ways that insist upon clearly defined racial and cultural boundaries, as if to suggest that there was no transcontinental movement of peoples and viruses prior to the rise of the ‘Asian tigers.’¹⁴

The construction of these clearly delineated ‘patterns’ is in service of both western heterosexual anxieties and nationalist discourses in the postcolonial world. As Patton notes:

The difference between Patterns One and Two thus helps white, Euro-American heterosexuals evade the idea that they might themselves be vulnerable since African (and African-American) homosexuality is so evidently different than Euro-American. Euro-American heterosexuality is “not at risk” as long as local AIDS is identified as homosexual and heterosexual AIDS remains distant.¹⁵

The conceptualisation of geographic and raciocultural boundaries which delimit various modalities of disease and desire are strikingly reminiscent of colonial era theorisations of the non-European world. As Canadian filmmaker John Greyson pointed out in his 1993 New Queer Cinema AIDS musical *Zero Patience*, the British explorer, ethnographer and orientalist Sir Richard Francis Burton hypothesised in the terminal essay of his translation of *One Thousand and One Nights* that there exists a so-called ‘Sotadic Zone’ of pederasty. Burton’s ‘cartography of perversion’ encompasses the southern Mediterranean region, Western Asia (with the exclusion of the Arabian peninsula), Central Asia, East Asia, the Pacific Islands and all of the Americas, and in this zone, “the Vice is popular and endemic, held at the worst to be a mere peccadillo, whilst the races to the North and South of the limits here defined practice it only sporadically amid the opprobrium of their fellows who, as a rule, are physically

¹³ Ibid., p.130.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

incapable of performing the operating and look upon it with the liveliest disgust.”¹⁶ Notably, all of Sub-Saharan Africa sits outside of the Sotadic zone, placing Africans in the same category as Northern Europeans, disapproving of homosexual acts. However, as Marc Epprecht notes, a perceived difference in cultural sophistication meant that, unlike the Northern Europeans, non-Sotadic Africans were at a real risk of being “corrupted” by “decadent Portuguese and Arabs” which “directly served the paternalistic vision of colonial and missionary interventions to protect Africa from those outsiders.”¹⁷

Similarly, Epprecht goes on to add that the construction of ‘African AIDS’ as purely heterosexual and generalised as opposed to being concentrated in gay, IDU and sex worker communities as it was conceived in the West was able to serve multilateral political purposes: African leaders were able to draw on this distinction by asserting that homosexuality was a product of colonialism and not a concern for Africans locally, whilst at the same time AIDS activists in the West were able to draw on the discovery of ‘heterosexual African AIDS’ to “deflect prevalent blame for HIV/AIDS away from the ‘homosexual lifestyle’” and mobilise broader public empathy by highlighting that the risk of AIDS was not limited to sexusocial deviants.¹⁸ As Epprecht notes, “both African and foreign scholars proved surprisingly receptive to this unscientific assertion” to the extent that “this understanding of African sexuality is now typically so much taken for granted that it does not even warrant a footnote to substantiate or quantify it.”¹⁹

As I have shown here, the persistence of pattern thinking by supranational actors and cultural mediators alike differentiates modalities of the virus based on presumptive and accusative logic, resulting in geopolitically-specific imaginaries of HIV/AIDS aligned to colonial moralities. In the case of *3 Needles*, the delineation of these three ‘patterns’ of HIV and their corresponding social impacts are clearly identifiable. In the same way that the WHO patterns claim to relate to behavioural/environmental aspects

¹⁶ Richard F. Burton, ‘Terminal Essay’, in Richard F. Burton (ed.), *The Book of the Thousand Nights and Night: A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arab Nights Entertainments*, London, Burton Club, 1886, Vol. 10.

¹⁷ Marc Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa?: The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 2008, p. 44.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.3.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.2.

but in fact correspond to racial categorisations and geographic divisions, I also identify the ways in which these patterns correspond to temporality, territoriality and biopolitics throughout the three narratives in the film.

3 Needles

3 Needles is Canadian playwright and director Thom Fitzgerald's second film about AIDS, the first being the 2000 film *The Event*, in which a Manhattan district attorney investigates a suspicious suicide by a gay man dying from the disease. In *3 Needles*, Fitzgerald adopts a multi-plot narrative approach to present three segments which emphasise the global nature of the epidemic. The film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2005 and went on to exhibit at various international film festivals, including the 2006 United Nations AIDS Film Festival on November 29th. On December 1st, in conjunction with World AIDS Day, the film made its commercial debut in the United States, with simultaneous commercial premieres in Boston, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Palm Springs, Pasadena, San Francisco, and in Singapore.²⁰

3 Needles consists of three seemingly unrelated vignettes concerning HIV/AIDS, corresponding to the three WHO-defined patterns of AIDS, and appearing in this order in the film: 'The Fortitude of the Buddha', about a blood-selling scandal in a remote village in southern China (Pattern Three); 'The Passion of the Christ', in which a working-class Quebecois porn actor conceals his seropositive status from his co-workers in Montreal so that he can continue working (Pattern One), and 'The Innocence of the Pagans', about an American Christian nun who tries to prevent the rape of children on a rural plantation farm in southern Africa (Pattern Two). However, the opening scene in the film is chronologically disjointed from the three constitutive narratives, its relevance to the narrative only becoming apparent after the end of the final (African) segment of the film. As I will demonstrate, this *in media res* bespeaks the logic of scientific racism which underscores each of the three 'needles' of the film, and illustrates the ways in which the global AIDS crisis is imagined in Euro-American AIDS cultural production. Crucially, this *in media res* opening sequence, presented out of context with its parent narrative, also serves to demonstrate the temporal and spatial

²⁰ BigFootEntertainment, *3 Needles official website*, <http://www.3needles.com/>, 2010.

coding of HIV/AIDS and people living with HIV or AIDS. In doing so, it aligns with the notion of *yuánshǐ* (原始), which Johanna Hood articulates through her work on the cultural mediation of HIV/AIDS in China as a term frequently used in China's HIV narrative, and which carries multivalent meanings of 'origin', 'ancient' or 'primitive', and serves to produce a sense of distance from HIV/AIDS for the Chinese urban Han majority²¹ which is also integral to the processes of nation-making that the multinational, multiethnic modern Chinese state engages in.²²

Genre: The 'Global Network Film' and the 'Global Citizen'

3 Needles fits loosely within the genre of the global network film as it attempts to portray the ways in which the AIDS crisis operates at both a global and an individual level. The term 'global network film' was coined by film scholar Neil Narine, and is typically distinguished by three key characteristics. Firstly, its narrative centres on an interconnected network of subjects where each subject is impacted in various ways by a specific event. Secondly, the narrative of the Global Network Film typically centres on the traumatic rupturing of a naive Westerner's sense of isolation or security, with the investigation of the traumatic event leading to the uncovering of a complex set of global relations and a defensive response or alignment of the interests between the Western protagonist and the Other. Thirdly, Narine suggests that the films in question are the synergistic products of a network of creative agents who are behind several of these productions. Narine goes on to note that the global network film genre is particularly indebted to three historical American cinematic tendencies: the social problem film, the economic guilt film, and the city film.²³ Whilst there are a number of films which can be located within this genre, such as *Traffic* (dir. Steven Soderbergh, 2000, USA), *Crash* (dir. Paul Haggis, 2004, USA/Germany), *Syriana* (dir. Stephen Gaghan, 2005, USA) and *Babel* (dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006, USA/Mexico), *3 Needles* is the first use this global framework as a way of representing the global AIDS pandemic.

²¹ Hood, pp. 292-3.

²² Dru C Gladney, 'Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 53, no. 1, 1994.

²³ Narine.

Key to the narrative function of the global network film is a cosmopolitan perspective which situates the protagonist in relation to contemporary discourses surrounding the notion of globalisation and the diffusion of geographic distance as an inoculation against risk. However, as Narine identifies, these films are also caught in a tension between attempting to expose the global circuits and power dynamics which influence the divergent modes of suffering across borders, and the neoliberal fantasy of the heroic individual. As Narine notes:

American popular culture in the early twenty-first century seems alternatively obsessed with exposing and documenting the trauma of the real, and *suturing over it* with binaristic narratives of heroism, disseminated by film studios and politicians alike, which eschew larger ethical-political questions. Wider issues are repressed, often purposefully, by accounts that valorise the individual's private responses to trauma and the will to survive.²⁴

Narine's argument that the trauma of the real is sutured over by narratives that emphasise private, individual responses to complex, multifaceted global problems are reflected in contemporary analyses of the discursive work of the notion of the global citizen as an emblematic cosmopolitan subject. In addressing the topic of 'marketing development' in relation to *Live 8* concerts in 2005, April Biccum argues that central to the new apparatus of development as advocated by the cosmopolitanising state is the "popularisation of development and the rise of development awareness," and that the production of such subjectivities serve both moral/ethical concerns in addition to serving domestic economic and security interests.²⁵ The subject of the global citizen who "advocates development under neoliberal terms," argues Biccum, reflects a state-driven desire to quash resistance to neoliberalism and globalisation in the population by co-opting anti-globalisation rhetoric into "mass popular spectacles that operate as a theatre of legitimation for neoliberal global governance."²⁶ The coalescence of the cosmopolitanising neoliberal state, supranational development organisations and global charity organisations in engaging in imperialist rhetoric around finding solutions to poverty in Africa is neatly demonstrated by Biccum through the presentation of an excerpt from the *Live 8 Official Book* (2005):

²⁴ Ibid., p.222., emphasis in original.

²⁵ April Biccum, 'Marketing Development: Live 8 and the Production of the Global Citizen', *Development and Change*, vol. 38, no. 6, 2007, p. 1111.

²⁶ Ibid., p.1120.

“To improve its ability to trade, Africa needs to improve transport and roads to make goods cheaper to move. It must scrap tariffs between one African country and another. It must abolish red tape and cumbersome customs procedures. It must make it easier to set up businesses. Many of these changes are easy, cheap, quick and in the hands of Africa itself.”²⁷

These demands bear striking resemblance to discourses of neoliberal globalisation as enmeshed through free trade agreements. Biccum borrows from Edward Said in characterising the coalescence of these views from NGOs, governments and in popular culture as a “consolidated vision.”²⁸ The popular spectacle of *Live 8* worked towards fabricating “more than a sense of national unity, but ultimately a sense of *trans-national* unity on the issues of poverty and development.”²⁹ This served to “restore public confidence [in supranational apparatuses of global governance such as the World Trade Organisation] by producing a megaspectacle of global citizenship.”³⁰ Further, these demands project a particularly neo-colonial vision in which the needs of the private market fundamentally trump the needs of the people in the countries in which intervention is sought.

As I demonstrate though this chapter, the frame through which Thom Fitzgerald’s film *3 Needles* is viewed attempts to portray the globally interconnected narratives of the HIV/AIDS crisis in three separate regionalised vignettes. In doing so, he is interpellating an audience of ‘global citizens’ who are aware of development discourse and the vision of a globalised world in which we are all stakeholders. However, much like the *Live 8* rhetoric around development in Africa, *3 Needles* thoroughly articulates a neo-colonial vision which views the regional specificities of HIV/AIDS and the geospatial inequities therein as inherent to certain places and peoples. This paternalistic, colonialist perspective which, on the surface, seeks to increase global awareness of the crisis, in fact ends up solidifying dangerous stereotypes through a misinformed understanding of the global AIDS crisis. In the case of *3 Needles*, the colonialist vision is apparent from the opening scene of the film. Further, media accounts of the reception of the film illustrate that Fitzgerald’s ‘ambitious’ vision

²⁷ Live 8 Official Book, as cited in *ibid.*, p.1123.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

of a film which accounts for and engages an international and interconnected global community ultimately failed to move beyond a North American viewpoint.

Time: Origin Stories

Although the three vignettes which constitute the film as a whole appear to be unrelated, the narrative chronology of *3 Needles* demonstrates the ways in which the global AIDS crisis is imagined in terms of time and space. Crucially, by situating the AIDS crisis in relation to a particular narrative chronology that begins with ‘tribal’ practices in Africa, an insinuation that the crisis has origins in Africa is made. The film opens with a chorus of song over a green hillside in a rural locale as a procession of people walk from the small settlement across the hill and into the forest. In the next shot, the camera pans over a group of young black men in the forest, painting each other white with clay; the camera seems to linger on the exposed buttocks and genitals of the men. The voice of the film’s narrator, Sister Hilde, (portrayed by Olympia Dukakis) provides the narrative context:

SISTER HILDE: Huku was fifteen years old. Like most boys, he was impatient for this day to arrive, and then surprised when it finally did. But his grandmother had told him the tribal wisdom: “you don’t feel a banana until it is ripe enough to eat.”



Fig. 3.1: The *in media res* sequence which opens *3 Needles*, depicting a circumcision ritual in ‘Africa’.



Fig. 3.2: A close-up shot of the blood-stained machete in *3 Needles*.



Fig. 3.3: Foreskins drop to the forest floor in *3 Needles*.



Fig. 3.4: Adolescent boys dance around a fire during an initiation ritual in *3 Needles*.

Invoking this supposed ‘tribal wisdom’ serves two functions in this opening scene. Firstly, it situates the forthcoming in relation to ‘non-Western’ forms of knowledge dissemination, structuring this information through its proximity to oral tradition as opposed to Western scientific rationalism. Secondly, it provides the context for justification of the actions, complicating the levels of complicity and the attribution of accountability in relation to the AIDS crisis. Standing in a line with their hands over their genitals, an older man now approaches and proceeds to circumcise the boys, saying to each “Now you are a man” (Fig. 3.1) as the graphic and visceral image of bloodied foreskins dropping to the forest floor (Fig. 3.3) punctuate the voyeuristic pseudo-anthropological *mise en scene*. Mid-range shots of each boy’s face are interspersed with long-range shots of the line of boys in the forest, and a closely-framed shot of the single blood-stained machete (Fig. 3.2). As Dukakis tells us and as we see onscreen, in the following weeks the boys were “educated in the ways of manhood,” learning to fight with sticks and to chant and dance around a fire at night (Fig. 3.4). All the while, a colonialist gaze is employed on these naked black bodies. Towards the end of the scene, the boys cover their bodies in clay from the river, at which point the colonialist gaze becomes most evident, as Dukakis’ narration returns the scene’s focus to the organ which simultaneously serves as metaphor for protection whilst also belying the forms of racialisation that impose such a fundamental difference in outcomes for people living with HIV. As the boys wash the clay from their bodies, Dukakis narrates that “the clay had rendered him invisible. When he regained his skin, it seemed somehow darker, tougher.” Thus, we have a circumcision, presented in this scene as a brutal and unsanitary tribal practice with the implication, by way of the bloodied machete, that it is the cause of HIV infection; innocence is brutally shed by shedding

skin, and the process is complete through a regaining of skin characterised as masculine in terms of colour and ruggedness.

Opening the film which such a scene serves two purposes. Firstly, it yokes the origins of the later scenes, and thus the origins of HIV/AIDS, to forms of biomedical knowledge production which confer responsibility for the AIDS crisis on particular 'barbaric' and 'backward' cultural practices rather than interrogating the ways in which, for example, the systemic violence and exploitation inherent in globalised neoliberal capitalism works to produce the conditions in which such a deadly virus can proliferate. It also functions as a way of devaluing non-Western cultural knowledge in ways that, with hindsight, prove to be problematic given UNAIDS-funded programs which excise adult male African foreskins as an element of broader public health and HIV prevention strategies, a point to which I will return in a later section.

In the context of the film, which is clearly grounded within the discourse of global AIDS and HIV awareness, this short (4 minute) *in media res* is illuminating. In a theme that we shall see repeated in both of the two non-Western segments of the film, the opening sequence serves as a synecdoche of 'Africa' as the primitive birthplace of the AIDS epidemic and as AIDS-ravaged dystopia. As Cindy Patton demonstrates, the

construal of 'Africa' as the margin of economic/cultural 'development' and as the 'heart' of the AIDS epidemic helps to stabilise a Euro-America adrift in a postmodern condition of lost metanarratives and occluded origins ... this new Africa-with-no-borders functions as a giant agar plate, etched by the 'natural history' of the AIDS epidemic.³¹

The Euro-American imaginary of HIV's origins lying in the 'backwards' practices of a racialised Other is further elaborated in the 'Chinese' and 'African' segments of the film, which buffer either side of the 'Western'/Canadian segment.

Time: yuánshǐ

In her extensive work on the history and cultural articulation of HIV and AIDS in the People's Republic of China, Johanna Hood dissects the ways in which racialised and class-based understandings of *sùzhì* (素质, quality) were and are mobilised in both state and commercial media depictions of the crisis, resulting in a sense of distance

³¹ Patton, 'From Nation to Family: Containing African AIDS', p. 127.

between the urban Han Chinese majority (as the imagined target media audience of mainstream culture in China) and the AIDS crisis. In a similar vein to the articulation of distance from HIV in the West, early reportage of the crisis focused on black Africans and Euro-American homosexual men. As Hood notes

although each type of sufferer was constructed using different language, all reflected local, hegemonic understandings of 'othered' people, places, and diseases. As HIV became better-known over time, the 'facts' of blood and fluid exchange evolved into understandings of HIV/AIDS based on moralised evaluations of sexual behaviour, sexual potency, unfavourable cultural characteristics and habits, primitivity, delayed sociocultural development, and poverty-based despair.³²

What is distinct about the articulation of HIV/AIDS in China, and pertinent to the ways in which depictions of the non-Western elements of the global AIDS crisis are formulated in the AIDS film, is that HIV, AIDS, and people understood to be 'at risk' in Chinese media accounts were structured not around specific behaviours but around "the identities and class - or *sùzhì* - associated most often with Chinese rural labourers, migrants, urban unwanted, and ethnic minorities."³³ Through extensive content analysis of portrayals of HIV and AIDS in Chinese-authored media, Hood builds on her concept of "imagined immunity." Borrowing from Benedict Anderson's influential theorisation of the concept of the nation as a modern, socially-constructed phenomenon articulated as an "imagined community,"³⁴ Hood demonstrates how very similar processes work towards producing an imagined immunity for urban middle-class Han Chinese in China. Crucially, this imagined immunity is reliant (and resultant) on the Othering of HIV and AIDS in Chinese media accounts. Hood correlates the perceptions of implication and immunity in urban Han populations with the language and imagery used in media accounts of the virus. Hood found that "both the virus and its sufferers are typically described as threatening, incurable, and uncontrollable, in addition to being shown as non-Chinese."³⁵ In particular, the mobilisation of the term *yuánshǐ* (原始, origin, primitive) in descriptions of the continent of Africa as the primitive 'origin' of the virus, and in relation to 'primitive' behaviours of African societies, serves to "shoehorn the

³² Johanna Hood, *HIV/AIDS, Health and the Media in China*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2011, p. 6.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Growth and Spread of Nationalism*, New York and London, Verso, 1983.

³⁵ Hood, 'Distancing Disease in the Un-Black Han Chinese Politic: Othering Difference in China's HIV/AIDS Media', p. 288.

debilitating effects of the virus into the pattern through which Africa and Africans perviously have been understood in Chinese cultural ideology.”³⁶ It is here that the temporal nature of this characterisation of the virus emerges, both in the context of the Chinese cultural articulation of HIV/AIDS as explored by Hood and in the ways in which AIDS as a problem of a (primitive, anachronistic) racialised Other in the Euro-American imagination is exemplified through the ‘Chinese’ and ‘African’ segments of the film. Coincidentally, where Fitzgerald attempts to portray the AIDS crisis in China - where, according to the WHO’s global typology, ‘AIDS came late’ - he engages in the same processes of Othering as the domestic Chinese discourse on AIDS.

Time: Being backwards

In the main ‘African’ segment of the film, which is the final segment, we return to Huku’s village, only now it is apparent (by seeing motor vehicles and western-style dress) that the opening scene of the film was not, as imagined, set in a distant premodern past, but was a traditional ceremony conducted in the present; in this sense, its presentation in the contemporary moment is articulated as archaic and anachronistic. As I demonstrate later, the narrative structure of this segment of the film is incredibly illustrative of the colonialist paradigm in which the film operates. However, in terms of temporality, it also points to the ways in which African temporality is constructed in Western colonial discourse and how these discourses persist in contemporary screen cultures. As the AIDS crisis in Africa is primarily represented as a problem of Africans being unable to understand and adapt to Western scientific modernism, the film situates AIDS in relation to lived experiences of time. ‘The Innocence of the Pagans’ contributes to a broader discourse of ‘African AIDS’ which overemphasises the role of ‘traditional’ attitudes, behaviours and knowledge production in contributing to the crisis in Africa whilst ignoring the impact of structural inequalities and uneven development which produced the very conditions in which HIV could thrive on the continent. Further, the insistence of highlighting raciocultural Otherness, articulated through atavism, and the persistence of African ‘irrationality’ points to a particular rendering of ‘African’ temporality. In contrast to the progressive linearity of Western biomedical knowledge as enacted by the white saviours of the film, the black African plantation workers are

³⁶ Ibid., p.294.

guided by myth. Achille Mbembe describes the ways in which ‘Africa’ and the notion of ‘traditional societies’ are discursively constructed in colonial parlance in terms of a temporal dissonance with Western, modern linear time, arguing that “traditional societies” are articulated as “being moved by the blind force of custom ... seen as living under the burden of charms, spells, and prodigies, and resistant to change.”³⁷ Similarly, in the ‘Chinese’ segment of the film, although the unscrupulous behaviour of the (urban/modern) blood merchants is pinpointed as the precursor to the AIDS crisis in rural China, the implicated population are cogently articulated as ‘backwards’ through the use of visual signifiers of ethnic difference. The modalities of ‘backwardness’ that these segments explore are juxtaposed with the temporality of the ‘Western’ segment of the film, in which modern biomedical knowledge and technology is utilised by the male porn performer in order to hide his positive HIV status. Importantly, these articulations of temporal dissonance are coherently mapped onto geospatial relations, through the production of backwards spaces.

Space: Backwards space

Cultural anthropologist and AIDS activist Sandra Hyde conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork throughout the 1990s in China’s southwestern Yúnnán province as the AIDS crisis in China was emerging and the central government had not yet acknowledged the epidemic, resulting in the 2007 book *Eating Spring Rice: The Cultural Politics of AIDS in Southwest China*. In her work, Hyde illustrates how, in the urban Han Chinese imaginary and in the central Chinese government’s response to the crisis, HIV/AIDS is “map[ped] onto certain places and people more readily than onto others.”³⁸ In particular, the borderlands of southwestern Yúnnán province, which have historically represented a wild and dangerous frontier of the Chinese state, and its population of non-Han ethnic minorities, were fertile sites onto which Han Chinese anxieties about contagion, disease and belonging could be placed. Working with the Tai/Dai ethnic minority in Sipsongpanna/Xīshuāngbǎnnà Autonomous Minority Prefecture on the border with Myanmar and Laos, Hyde describes how the Tai/Dai ethnic minority were characterised by Han Chinese doctors, bureaucrats and officials in

³⁷ Achille Mbembé, *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001, p. 4.

³⁸ Sandra Teresa Hyde, *Eating Spring Rice: The Cultural Politics of AIDS in Southwest China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007.

the provincial capital Kunming as “a loose and sexually uninhibited people (*lànjiāo*, 濫交) and that their sexual practices were leading to high rates of sexually transmitted infections,” a view with a significant history through both Imperial Chinese and European colonial attitudes to the region.³⁹ For Hyde, approaching the AIDS crisis in China “unfurls a taut canvas painted with fetishes of late modernity: sexuality, desire, and nonwhite, non-Han bodies.”⁴⁰ Inasmuch as Johanna Hood’s work identifies the ways in which AIDS was constructed visually and linguistically as an ‘African’ problem, Hyde’s work demonstrates the ways in which the category of blackness and racial Othering is also a product of internal colonialism as applied by the Han Chinese majority to the multitude of ethnic minorities in China. Further, as Gladney illustrates, the construction of the exotic minority Other is crucial to modern multinational Chinese state, both in terms of producing a sense of difference between the ‘backwards’ ethnic minorities and the idealised urban Han middle-class, and in terms of the Chinese state positioning itself as a modern, multiethnic “nation among nations.”⁴¹

In the ‘Chinese’ segment of *3 Needles*, which is titled ‘The Fortitude of the Buddha’, the issues of racialised Othering of HIV emerge in part due to the naivety of the Canadian production. In this sense, these issues could be considered accidental or coincidental to the theorisation explored in this chapter with regards to the codification of various modalities of global AIDS through the global network film. However, it is important to critically approach the racialised construction of HIV/AIDS in the Euro-American imaginary, particularly where it is presented along the lines of development discourse. Thom Fitzgerald, the filmmaker, noted that his executive production team were met with repeated problems and refusals by central government officials to film inside China, so instead the ‘Chinese’ segment was actually filmed in the remote village of Santikhiri (formerly Mae Salong) in northern Thailand’s Chiang Rai province. Mae Salong was known for being the home of the ‘lost army’ of the Republic of China’s 93rd Division, who refused to surrender after the defeat of the Kuomintang in the Chinese Civil War and lived in the jungles in Myanmar and later sought asylum in Mae Salong in exchange for fighting for Thailand to counter the communist insurgency. Contemporary Santikhiri’s population of majority ethnic Chinese descendants from the

³⁹ Ibid., p.7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.33-4.

⁴¹ Gladney.

93rd Division (who speak the southwestern dialect of Mandarin) in addition to members of the Akha tribe, and its ethnotourism industry attracted the production team to use the village as a filming location, with many local people hired as actors and extras.⁴² Although the Akha are not officially recognised by the Chinese government as their own ethnic minority (instead, they are considered to be a part of the Hani ethnic minority), the Akha live in remote hilltop areas in southern Yúnnán province, northern Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Viet Nam.⁴³

Within the visual economy of the film, the mobilisation of marked signifiers of ethnic difference carries great importance in the context of the temporal, spatial and biopolitical codification of HIV/AIDS in both the PRC and in the West. In the global stratification of the ‘patterns’ of the AIDS crisis, Pattern Three, or ‘Asian AIDS’, is differentiated from Patterns One and Two, both of which are designated in terms of behaviours and routes of transmission; in contrast, Pattern Three is defined through spatiotemporality, imagined as a geographical place that has, until recently (and at this late stage in the global AIDS crisis) remained free of HIV. This temporal nature to the epidemic, which posits that HIV was born in the depths of the primordial, primitive African continent, that was transported from its originary home to the West via increasing global mobility afforded by technologies of late capitalism, where it entered degenerate bodies through technologies coded as problems of modernity (non-procreative intercourse; the commercial sex trade; injecting drug use), and has arrived late in Asia through the spread of these modernising technologies produces a chronology of the crisis that situates the virus in relation to various notions of backwardness. Heather Love argues that “backwardness” and “feeling backward” constitute structures of feeling that both configure and represent queer culture.⁴⁴ In a similar vein, Valerie Rohy points to the mobilisation of Darwinian notions of “primitivism and arrested development extant in scientific racism to represent homosexuality as an atavistic sign of evolutionary and individual regression,”⁴⁵ and further extends this critique of theories of anachronicity in relation to race and sexuality,

⁴² BigFoot BigFootEntertainment.

⁴³ Bernard Henin, 'Ethnic Minority Integration in China: Transformation of Akha Society', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1996.

⁴⁴ Love.

⁴⁵ Valerie Rohy, 'Ahistorical', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2006, p. 67.

arguing that the ‘backwards’ temporality of the Othered subject (the homosexual; the person of colour), as evidence of a “regression” and atavism, functions not only as the “necessary other” upon which “straight time” relies in order to maintain its boundaries, but that anachronism “is always inside normative temporality.”⁴⁶ Each of the three segments of *3 Needles* parlay in the representation of atavistic backwardness as the indexical sign of viral proximity.

In ‘The Fortitude of the Buddha’, it is through the sartorial and narrative representation of the supposed rural Chinese village, codified as ‘backwards’ through a basic representation of core-periphery (urban-rural) relations in a modernising China, that the narrative intends to implicate the villagers and the blood merchants in positions of exploitation and power, respectively. A heavily-pregnant entrepreneurial blood merchant, Peng (portrayed by Chinese-American film star Lucy Liu), drives a van along a dusty road in what we are told by the narrator is “the southernmost tip of China, in the shadow of the Burmese mountains.” At a military roadblock, Peng attempts to pass off her wooden crate of black-market blood products as rape seeds, a fact disproven when the military officers shoot at the crate and it flows with blood. To avoid being arrested, Peng allows the band of military men to have sex with her and let her on her way. She enters a small village, and it is here that the radicalisation and codification of atavistic difference is visually enunciated. Peng is shown in only one outfit throughout the film, despite appearing across multiple scenes ostensibly over a narrative period of months. The outfit consists of a long-sleeved plain red tunic reaching midway down her calves with slits to her waist, plain black slacks, and unadorned hair and face with her long hair pulled into low ponytail (Fig 3.6). In situations in which Peng’s position in the urban-rural hierarchy situates her as ‘less urban’ than her interlocutors - when she is stopped by the military on the road outside the village, when she is in the city, and when she presents at the hospital - Peng is shown wearing the conical bamboo hat typically associated with rural dwellers and farming communities in southeast Asia. Importantly, when she is in the village to collect blood, or when she is interacting with the bloodhead for whom she is working and sleeping with, she is not. By way of sartorial contrast between Peng and the villagers from whom she is taking blood, Peng’s class status and proximity to notions of *sùzhì* and civilisation are illustrated as relative and mobile.

⁴⁶ Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality*, p. xv.



Fig. 3.5: 'Villagers' in 'The Fortitude of the Buddha' wearing Akha ethnic dress.



Fig. 3.6: Peng (Lucy Liu) addresses the villagers wearing a simple tunic in 'The Fortitude of the Buddha'.

Further, she is sartorially codified in two ways, one of which is the result of the filmmaker's intent, the other of which is a side-effect of the production problems faced in trying to film within China. Firstly, as the villagers are all shown wearing 'traditional' (ethnic) costume,⁴⁷ consisting of bright and colourful patterns and incredibly elaborate headdresses and adornments (Fig 3.5), yet are speaking Mandarin and are not otherwise signified as racially Other in the narrative of the film, we are to understand this codification as a sartorial representation of peripherality and rural, agrarian identity in contrast to Peng, whose unadorned tunic appearance (Fig. 3.6), access to a vehicle and position of power as a blood collector signifies that she is to be read as 'more urban' and 'more civilised' than the villagers she exploits. The relativity of Peng's class identity is further elaborated in a scene in the middle of the segment, as the main protagonist Tong Sam, a rice farmer who was not allowed to give blood due to illness and who subsequently loses his wife and daughter to AIDS (in addition to his neighbours), crossed paths on a road with Peng. Tong Sam and his daughter are travelling with an ox and cart, the proceeds of his daughter's donation payment; a shot of them trudging along the road through the rice fields contrasts with a shot of Peng driving her van. Later however, after she has parked her van on the side of the road to sleep, she is awoken by a busload of tourists who eagerly take photos of her in the van, as an authentic rural woman, revealing Peng's power and class status in the village (where she is read as modern/urban) to be relative. Similarly, Peng's social mobility, which is both afforded by and represented through the physical mobility enabled by her

⁴⁷ The ethnic identity of the villagers is not made clearly evident in the narrative of the film, however by assessing the key features of their traditional costumes, I was able to correlate their ethnic identity with the shooting location in northern Thailand to deduce that they were members of the Akha minority, due mostly to the unique and specific features of their costumes. Akha women wear head-dresses adorned with silver globes and beads.

access to a vehicle (in contrast to Tong Sam's slow journeys with the ox and cart), is revealed as highly relational when she seeks medical assistance at the hospital in the prefecture-level city. Here, Peng's status as a rural woman inside the modern hospital setting situates her as backward, particularly when the attending doctor identifies HIV infection and clandestinely provides her with antiretrovirals to prevent mother-to-child transmission of the virus during labour.

Space: Colonial Space

However, although these issues are not enunciated in the film, implicit in these sartorial markers of class and status are also racialised codifications of China's internal orientalism⁴⁸ and the tensions between the Han Chinese majority and the many ethnic minority groups which constitute the remaining 8% of the Chinese population. In Yúnnán, ethnic minority groups constitute one third of the population, including the Akha (who are categorised as a subsection of the Hani people by the Chinese government); further, as Hyde demonstrates, ethnicity and race are fundamentally constitutive of the history of the cultural articulation and government response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in China in the 1980s and 1990s. In relation to the narrative of 'The Fortitude of the Buddha', the mobilisation of these sartorial signifiers of 'backwardness' and their racialised ramifications are particularly telling of the filmmaker's misplaced articulation of the AIDS crisis in China. As Hyde's ethnographic work details, ethnicity within China was crucial to early understandings and approaches to HIV. Yúnnán province, bordering Myanmar and Laos, has long been characterised in the Han Chinese imaginary as a "wild frontier" of the empire, inhabited by 'exotic' people and practices; its history as a major conduit in the heroin trade of the Golden Triangle and the configuration of ethnic minorities as feminised, sexually deviant and implicated in the commercial sex trade all contributed to its provenance as "ground zero of the epidemic, where heroin users were first identified as infected in the late 1980s and early 1990s."⁴⁹ Further, the marginalisation of ethnic minorities in China and the mobilisation of European Social Darwinian theories of eugenics from the 1920s which produced racialised hierarchies led to ethnic minorities in southwest China as being potent bodies

⁴⁸ Louisa Schein, 'Gender and Internal Orientalism in China', *Modern China*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1997.

⁴⁹ Hyde, p. 2.

in which threats to the Han Chinese body (and by extension the body of the nation proper) could be ascribed. It is in this context that Hyde argues that the emergence of the plasma economy crisis in rural Hénán province in the late 1980s and early 1990s was overshadowed by the perception that HIV in China was “considered a minority problem,” as “the epidemiological emphasis was still on the counties in rural minority Yúnnán.”⁵⁰

It is important to note here the semantic bounds that the Canadian filmmakers make in this supposedly ‘global’ narrative about HIV/AIDS. By presenting the narrative of the AIDS crisis in China through the plasma economy, misplaced onto rural Yúnnán (where the key issues in HIV transmission were not blood collecting but the commercial sex trade, drug trafficking and IV drug use among marginalised people) and articulated through the spectacle of racialised difference masquerading as mere class/rural difference, the economy of meaning upon which ‘The Fortitude of the Buddha’ relies is revealed as both littered with factual errors and dependant on an unspoken typology of racialised difference with situates Han and non-Han China in a tension based on notions of ‘backwardness’ and capitalist exploitation. Further, it bolsters the racialised narrative of AIDS that we see in the opening *in media res* and the final, ‘African’ segment, aptly titled ‘The Innocence of the Pagans’, by reaffirming the logic that HIV/AIDS in the West is a problem of modern sexuality and consumption practices that can be transfigured onto bodies of those who deviate from conventional forms of embodiment (in terms of sex and drug use), as opposed to HIV/AIDS in ‘Africa’ or ‘China’ in which proximity to the risk of HIV/AIDS is configured in relation to ethnicity, traditional cultural practices and backwardness. As such, what emerges is a theorem whereby AIDS in the West is understood as a problem *introduced by* modernity and elsewhere as a *failure to become* modern. It is in ‘The Innocence of the Pagans’ that the film’s heretofore implicit racialisation of disease transmogrifies into an explicit statement attributing blame on the crisis again on the black African phallus, as we return to where we started.

In ‘The Innocence of the Pagans’, the narrator is finally revealed as Sister Hilde, the matron of a small group of three American missionaries (Olympia Dukakis as Hilde, Chloe Sevigny, Sandra Oh) of Saint Jude’s Convent, somewhere in rural South Africa.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The convent sits within a large company-owned plantation farm which employs the local Xhosa people and is managed by an Afrikaner man, Mr Halliday. Hilda's voiceover tells us of their purpose: "our mission was simple: with Africans dying at such a rapid rate, we would save as many souls as we could, before they were condemned to purgatory." The nuns operate a hospice where local people come to die from AIDS, and attempt to convert as many dying patients as possible to Catholicism before they pass. It is in this segment of the film that the most intense forms of racialised difference as an indicator of HIV proximity and attribution of blame are to be found. Sister Clara (Chloe Sevigny) is asked to take a young girl to the local clinic by one of the Afrikaner medics. Upon examination at the clinic, the black African nurse matter-of-factly advises that the child has been raped. Back at the plantation, the child is scrutinised by the plantation middle-man who acts as a conduit between the upper management and the workers, and she reveals that it was one of the plantation workers who raped her. Sister Hilde provides context in the voiceover:

SISTER HILDE: Somewhere a witch doctor advised an ailing man that having sex with a virgin would cure his infection. Just like Christ's word, conceived by god and born of man, it travelled from mouth to mouth until a belief had been born, only this one was born of man but conceived by the devil.

In a strikingly similar yet more profound way, the mobilisation of images of the 'savagery' of racialised Others in this segment sits in tandem with the characterisation of HIV/AIDS in China in the previous segment. In 'The Innocence of the Pagans', a delineation is made between the white Afrikaners and Americans who are represented as selfless saviours employing the 'Western' forms of scientific knowledge and medicine to 'save' black African souls, and the black Africans themselves who are coded as barbaric and bereft of the ability to understand scientific knowledge in deference to atavistic, archaic practices which perpetuate the disease. Thus, not only is HIV/AIDS articulated as originating in Africa through 'barbaric' practices in the opening scene, but it is also characterised as being transmitted by Africans through horrific barbaric acts of sexual violence. In this sense, black Africans are coded as being both generator and promulgator of the AIDS crisis, responsible for both enabling the virus to spread to humans in the first place and for unwittingly dissipating it throughout the population through a lack of Western scientific savvy and a reliance on 'traditional'/'tribal' forms of archaic knowledge and practice. Further, this

characterisation is reliant on the underlying acceptance of racist tropes which freely circulate in the cultural sphere in relation to the black male body's unbridled sexuality.

These racist articulations of black African sexuality and atavistic habitus continue to inflect this segment of the film with their colonial imaginary. After Sister Clara identifies the small child's rapist as the plantation worker Bongile, she keeps her eye on his behaviour. He is twice depicted as making sexual advances on young women; in one scene, his advances are interrupted by Sister Clara who walks up to him and hands him a condom, irking his female companion and frustrating his attempts. Frustrated at her helplessness in trying to improve the conditions at the plantation, Sister Clara approaches the plantation manager Mr Halliday and exchanges sexual services for resources. When Halliday asks Clara what she would like to happen to Bongile, her response reflects the colonial attitudes towards the danger of black male sexuality as she proclaims that she would "like to see him circumcised from the waist down." Here, Bongile is the synecdoche of the perceived problem in trying to stem the flow of the virus in Africa: if only black African men could be neutered in order to 'save' the women and children of the continent.

In another scene, Sister Clara watches in muted confusion as two small children sift through the bio-hazardous waste bin behind the convent, reaching in and picking out discarded needles. She then follows the children back to the town, watching in horror as she sees them placing the used needles back into the packaging and resealing the packages with glue, at which point she realises the true veracity of the crisis on the plantation: this is the same provider from which the convent sources medical supplies, meaning that the entire plantation has been exposed to HIV through unsterilised needles. Yet again, in this segment of the film subaltern naiveté and African ignorance of Western science is located as the root cause of the crisis, with uninformed black African subjects articulated as being fundamentally complicit in the virus's ravaging of the continent.

It is in the final scenes of the segment that the colonial logic of the film and the attribution of blame for the AIDS crisis is reinforced. For the third time, Clara provides sexual services to Halliday in exchange for resources: in this case, she requests a shipment of the antiretroviral nevirapine "for the pregnant mothers," a job for Huku so that he can afford the dowry to marry his girlfriend, and "to scare the shit out of Bongile

so he'll stop killing people." The next day, police arrive to arrest Bongile and take him to jail. That night, in the dark, a group of black African men break into the convent and proceed to rape the nuns. As Sister Hilde is left to die, semi-buried in the mud outside the convent, she says in voiceover: "Who am I to judge them? I pray to a virgin every night of my life." This scene neatly stitches the previous scenes into a narrative in which the white nuns are reified as saviours, placing themselves at risk in the course of living up to White (wo)Man's Burden and ultimately falling victim to the atavistic and barbaric myth of 'virgin cleansing' which stipulates that unenlightened black African men believe that HIV infection can be cured through the rape of a virgin. In contrast to the progressive linearity of Western biomedical knowledge as enacted by the white saviours, the black African plantation workers are guided by myth. This is particularly pertinent in the case of Sister Clara, who, despite her role as a Catholic nun, rejects the mythic discourse of her Christian faith and disagrees with Sister Hilde as to the utility of saving the souls of the dying when the application of Western medical knowledge could save the lives of the living. This contrasts with the representation of the 'uncivilised' black African men whose temporality is presented as cyclical, aligning with Mbembe's argument that non-Western subjects are discursively produced as dissonant with modernity and Western time.

Body: Bad Blood

It is crucial to note the routes of transmission that are emphasised in each of the segments of the film and the ways in which these routes of transmission are mapped onto embodied practices that are articulated through cultural differences. In the *in media res* at the beginning of the film, transmission is signified by way of the bloodied machete used in the circumcision ceremony. In 'The Fortitude of the Buddha', it is the shared needles used by the blood merchants in taking the blood of the villagers. Similarly, in 'The Innocence of the Pagans', HIV is transmitted to the plantation workers through unsterilised needles which are taken from the plantation and then repackaged and sold back to the plantation infirmary. In contrast, needles and blood figure in a more 'positive' sense in the 'Western' segment of the film, 'The Passion of the Christ'. Here, the porn actor Denys conceals his HIV status from his employers by surreptitiously taking vials of his father's blood to pass mandatory HIV tests. His plot is foiled, however, when a serologist identifies that the blood is from a dead body. As he

returns home to see his dead father's body being removed from the family home in a stretcher, he finds his mother sobbing, watching a pornographic film that Denys starred in in the living room. Now aware of both his status and his occupation, his mother takes out a life insurance policy for herself, and then attempts to seroconvert, first by having condomless sex with a male client at a strip club, and then, after finding that she has still not seroconverted, by extracting a vial of Denys' blood and injecting herself with it. After paying the doctor to provide her with a medical opinion that she has less than seven years to live, she is able to cash her insurance policy for \$2,000,000. Her newfound wealth dramatically changes the family's lives. No longer a waitress at a diner, in the next scene her and Denys are shown having lunch at an expensive restaurant. Here, Denys is confronted by a former colleague, now working as a waitress herself:

WAITRESS:	They tell us it's not illegal, what you did. There's nothing we can do to you, but we've all got it. Five if us. And we can all trace it back to you.
DENYS:	I didn't know for sure
WAITRESS:	But you must have thought....
DENYS:	I needed the money.
WAITRESS:	You killed me for \$800.

In 'The Passion of the Christ', HIV in the west is discursively constructed in two ways. Firstly, it is constituted in terms of sex and sexuality, and more specifically, in terms of sexual deviance. Denys' proximity to sexual deviance, by way of his employ in the sex industry, engenders both his risk to acquiring HIV and his ability to act as a central node of transmission within a particular circuit. Secondly, within the context of universal health care and destigmatisation of HIV in Canada, HIV is construed as an enabler to accessing state-funded services (or, as the case may be, insurance claims). Contrasting the ways in which HIV and seroconversion are constructed in the three segments of *3 Needles* is enlightening *vis-à-vis* the representational biopolitics at play in the film.

Body: Disfiguring the Colonial Body

In 'The Innocence of the Pagans', it is the seeming inability for non-Western subjects to adhere to and understand modern biomedical science that is centred as the

root cause for the rapid transmission of HIV in the plantation (and by extension, the rest of ‘Africa’). Here, the body of the colonial subject is a site for disfigurement, cogently allegorised in the opening scene by the bloodied machete which is used to circumcise each of the young men in the rite of passage ceremony. What is particularly noteworthy are the ways in which corporeal practices garner divergent meanings depending on the relevant authority in question. In 2007, UNAIDS released recommendations that men in high-prevalence countries who have sex with women should be voluntarily circumcised to reduce the risk of female-to-male HIV transmission.⁵¹ With this recommendation, the excision of the flesh of the African foreskin is no longer articulated as an atavistic or barbaric initiation ritual as illustrated in ‘The Innocence of the Pagans’ but as an inexpensive public health intervention promoted by the global authority on AIDS. In 2013, UNAIDS and WHO gave official endorsement to Circ MedTech Ltd for their non-surgical circumcision device, PrePex, a disposable plastic device which requires no surgery, anaesthesia, sterile setting or medical practitioner to facilitate circumcision on adults.⁵² Conversely and concomitantly, trials for pre-exposure prophylaxis – or, PrEP – had commenced around the same time, however widespread implementation of this remarkably less invasive HIV-prevention method has thus far been limited to risk groups outside of Africa. The likelihood that men in risk groups in the West will be encouraged to get circumcised as a way of reducing HIV infection risk remains low.

3 Needles typifies a form of cultural production which claims to present a diversified vision of interconnected global disparities but in reality reproduces the very disparities it attempts to highlight. Whilst the filmmaker had a noble aim of emphasising the paradoxical notion that the HIV pandemic is at once fundamentally global yet its material realities are geopolitically specific, *3 Needles* ultimately fails to account for the interconnected structures and processes by which these disparities are produced. The three stories are not presented as interconnected by the virus; rather, these vignettes work to reinforce the borders which separate the experiences of

⁵¹ UNAIDS, *Safe, Voluntary, Informed Male Circumcision and Comprehensive HIV Prevention Programming: Guidance for Decision-Makers on Human Rights, Ethical and Legal Considerations*, edited, Geneva, UNAIDS, 2007, http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/jc1552_circumcision_en_0.pdf.

⁵² Sophie Barton-Knott, *UNAIDS Welcomes Pre-Qualification by WHO of First Non-Surgical Device for Adult Male Circumcision in HIV Prevention Efforts*, edited, Geneva, UNAIDS, 2013, <http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2013/june/20130607psvmmc>.

seropositives by mobilising images of cultural difference as articulated by a western gaze and repackaging these vignettes under the guise of a global media event.

MTV's *Shuga*

Not all supranational HIV/AIDS awareness screen-media projects are as unsuccessful and misguided as *3 Needles*, as the following analysis will illustrate. The difference seemingly lies in the conception and production of the screen text as a tool for education and entertainment which clearly defines a target audience and works with local communities to develop content which engages that audience. An incredibly successful entertainment-education (EE) series of recent times is the MTV Base franchise *Shuga*. Funded and produced by a multilateral coalition of supranational aid donors, multinational media companies and national government AIDS councils, the series is noteworthy for its combination of glocalised youth culture and health promotion messaging acutely targeting young people in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). However, as I shall explore, the range of episodic and serialised narratives presented in the programs also demonstrate inherent North/South tensions in HIV policy and funding, and demonstrate the ways in which the same neoliberal ideology of individual responsibility that is invoked in gay male sexual scenes in the global north in relation to antiretroviral access is mobilised in the Global South in relation to abstinence, revealing the ways in which access to pleasure and sexual risk are delineated along geopolitical lines.

In this section, I first discuss the history of the entertainment-education genre and its utilisation in health campaigns in the Global South. I then provide a brief synopsis and overview of the production context of the series within the *Shuga* universe and situate the franchise within the genre of entertainment-education. Following this, I analyse the series along spatial, temporal and biopolitical themes. In relation to space and spatialisation, I address the series' location in the cities of Nairobi (Kenya), Lagos (Nigeria) and Johannesburg (South Africa), arguing that the show represents a cosmopolitan pan-African modernity, triangulated by these three major nodes. Given the demographics in the region and the necessity for entertainment-education programming that is relatable to at-risk populations - particularly rural and regional populations - I discuss the narrative trope of rural migrants who enter the sex industry in

the cosmopolitan city, and demonstrate how this contrasts with the representation of the 'runs girl' yet both work to highlight particular risks in relation to sex work and HIV in SSA. Finally, I present a biopolitical analysis of the program, identifying central health promotion messaging which demonstrates how this supranational project is constitutive of the discourse of the neoliberal sexual actor. However, in contrast to the mobilisation of this discourse in the global north, which aims to interpellate ideal consumers, here we can see the ways in which this discourse is mobilised as a HIV prevention tool which aims to intervene in an assumed problematic African sexuality, relaying colonial tropes and producing a delineation between those who are afforded pleasure and those who are not.

Production Context and Summary

Set against the backdrop of the clubs, bars, radio stations and campus life of Nairobi, Kenya, the debut season of *Shuga* was produced by MTV's Staying Alive Foundation for distribution on Viacom's afrocentric channels MTV Base and MTV Base Africa, and was funded by a consortium of NGOs including The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Elton John AIDS Foundation, Unicef and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). *Shuga* follows in the footsteps of, and shares a production company with, the highly successful South African program *Soul City*, which was developed alongside a rigorous research methodology to measure its efficacy throughout its ongoing 21 year production history. The first season of *Shuga* was released in 2009, consisting of three 24-minute episodes centred around Nairobi-based university student Ayira, portrayed by Lupita Nyong'o in her breakout role. The second season, *Shuga: Love Sex Money* (2011) incorporated feedback from the response of the first season, and attempted to introduce a subplot about homosexuality and broadened the cast and the scope, introducing a narrative addressing the rural/urban divide in Kenya and reinstating a focus on abstinence and monogamy. In 2013, the third season shifts from Nairobi to Lagos, Nigeria, using the character of Femi (portrayed by former Mr. Nigeria, Nollywood star Emmanuel Ikubese), a Lagotian introduced in the Nairobi season, as a segue. Dubbed *ShugaNaija*, the third season included Nigeria's National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA) as a funding body and overseer, and apart from Femi, introduced an entirely new cast of Nigerian actors, including well known West African

stars such as Chris Attoh, a Ghanaian star of Nigerian soap operas, and Tiwa Savage, a Nigerian pop singer. There were also changes in the writing and production crew, and the overall production design reflected a Nigerian style and an interplay with Nollywood aesthetics and narrative structures, with the screenwriting by Kemi Adesoye and Biyi Bandele directing all episodes. Lagos remains the setting for the fourth season, 2015's *MTV Shuga 4*. In 2017, a third setting for the series is introduced in *Shuga: Down South*, centred around the fictional township of Zenzele in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Central to *Shuga*'s success in attracting the target audience were elements of multimodal distribution, incorporating web content, radio programmes, terrestrial television broadcasting, online narrowcasting and print media. In addition, each series featured numerous cameo appearances from both new and established celebrities, and heavily featured Genge, Afropop and R&B music and musicians popular in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nameless and Nonini (*Shuga*), Iyanya and Nneke (*Shuga Naija*), and Seyi Shay, Fifi Cooper, Vanessa Mdee and Kwesta (*Shuga: Down South*).

Genre: Entertainment-Education (EE)

Shuga is an exemplary model of an Entertainment-Education (EE) programme incorporating multimodal distribution and youth-oriented aesthetics, celebrities and content in order to engage the target audience. The entertainment-education model is defined as “a theory-based communication process for purposefully embedding education and social issues in the creation, production, processing and dissemination process of an entertainment program, in order to achieve desired individual, community, institutional, and societal changes among the intended media user population.”⁵³ The Mexican television producer Miguel Sabido pioneered the ‘Sabido Method’ in the 1970s, producing telenovelas which he described as “entertainment with a proven social benefit.”⁵⁴ Through the incorporation of Bandura's social cognitive theory, which emphasises the plasticity of “human nature”, which Bandura argues is demonstrative of

⁵³ Hua Wang and Arvind Singhal, 'Entertainment-Education Through Digital Games', in Ute Ritterfeld, Michael Cody, and Peter Vorderer (eds), *Serious Games: Mechanisms and Effects*, London and New York, Routledge, 2009, pp. 272-3.

⁵⁴ Miguel Sabido, 'The Origins of Entertainment-Education', in Arvind Singhal, et al. (eds), *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice*, Mahwah, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.

an inherent agentic perspective,⁵⁵ the Sabido Method aims to draw on established theoretical models and extensive reception studies in order to measure the efficacy of the social learning narratives which are incorporated into the programme. As Sabido notes, the telenovela is particularly suited to adapting entertainment-education models because of the high level of audience saturation of soap operas in developing countries and the extant format of the genre, whereby “every telenovela is a basic reflection of good and evil ... for this reason, most telenovelas are melodramas with the ability to provoke identification and de-identification processes with role models by audience individuals.”⁵⁶ In a special edition of the journal *African Communication Research* dedicated to the topic, Eliza Govender suggests that entertainment-education has been particularly innovative and successful on the African continent.⁵⁷

Indeed, *Shuga* was certainly not the first attempted intervention into sexual behaviour through the use of an entertainment-education model. In 1984, Sabido’s methodology was exported first to India and then to Kenya, with Indian and Kenyan civil servants and media production teams travelling to the Televisa network studios in Mexico City in 1983 to be trained by Sabido in how to apply the method to their own local contexts.⁵⁸ Later that year, in the context of agitations between Kenyan Catholic bishops and then president Daniel Arap Moi over family planning and concerns over population size, the government endorsed a national entertainment-education project in order to address the issue of birth control at a population level in the country.⁵⁹ This culminated in the television serial *Tushauriane (Come With Me)* in 1987, which was “the highest rated television program in the history of Kenyan television,” and is credited as contributing to a 58% increase in contraceptive use and a decrease in “desired family size ... from 6.3 to 4.4 children.”⁶⁰ *Shuga* itself draws heavily on the expertise and experience of the most expansive and research-intensive entertainment-

⁵⁵ Albert Bandura, 'Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective', *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2001, p. 266.

⁵⁶ Sabido, p. 73.

⁵⁷ Eliza Govender, 'Working in the Grey Zone: Exploring Education-Entertainment in Africa', *African Communication Research*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2013, p. 1.

⁵⁸ David O Poindexter, 'A History of Entertainment-Education', in Arvind Singhal, et al. (eds), *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice*, Mahwah, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.30.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.31.

education project, *Soul City* in South Africa, set in the fictional Soul City Township. The television program is in its twelfth season, and has been running since 1994 through the Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication, with materials in all languages spoken in South Africa and across broadcast television, radio and print media.⁶¹ Soul City's sister program aimed at children, *Soul Buddyz*, shares a production company with *Shuga* in The Bomb Shelter Productions.

The entertainment-education model has three key characteristics which are evident in the example of *Shuga*. Firstly, entertainment-education productions are grounded in theory and research. Entertainment-education research- and theory-intensive production model is due in part to the common funding models of the programmes - in most cases, funding is received from government or non-government organisations and supranational charitable organisations - and thus a need to ensure that the funding bodies' targets and aims will be met and that the project will be delivered within constrained budgetary conditions. In their meta-analysis⁶² of research on the effects of entertainment-education programmes, Sood, Menard and Witt identified seven categories of theoretical constructs utilised in the production and development of the programs: "steps-of-change" models including McGuire's (1969) hierarchy of effects model and Rovigatti's (1981) circular model of communication; social-psychological models, particularly Bandura's (1977) social learning theory; psychological models such as MacLean's triune brain perspective (1973); dramaturgical theories such as Bentley's (1967) dramatic theory, Jung's (1970) archetypes of the collective unconscious and Kincaid's (2002) conceptualisation of drama theory; audience-centred theories such as parasocial interaction and the two-step flow model; contextual theories such as Gramsci's theory of hegemony and theories of social constructionism; and finally, hybrid models that incorporate a range of the aforementioned theories, which include the Soul City model of behaviour change and the ideation theory the Johns Hopkins University's Centre for Communication Programs (JHU/CCP) developed by

⁶¹ SoulCity, *Soul City Television Series*, <http://www.soulcity.org.za/projects/soul-city-series>, 2016, (accessed 19 March).

⁶² Sood, Menard and Witte's (2004) meta-analysis limited the scope to articles that had been published in peer reviewed journals, that drew on empirical data to assess the effects of the programs, and excluded articles that "gave posthoc explanations as to why an entertainment-education program had the effects it did, by scholars who were uninvolved in the original program." (p.118).

Lawrence Kincaid.⁶³ Sood, Menard and Witt note that the genre of entertainment-education itself is indebted to a history of rigorous research and the application of theoretical models, describing how Miguel Sabido's invention of the genre was the result of two years of research and analysis of the popular Peruvian soap opera *Simplemente Maria* in the late 1970s in order to develop a theoretical model for the production of popular telenovelas for the promotion of social change.⁶⁴ Concomitant with a grounding in theoretical approaches to production, or "formative" research, are what Singhal and Rogers classify as "process" and "summative" research.⁶⁵ Process research encapsulates the analysis of audience feedback throughout broadcasts in order for the timely incorporation of "mid-course corrections," and summative research "measures the effects of the entertainment-education campaign on audience behaviour."⁶⁶ The second characteristic of the entertainment-education model is a defined pedagogical goal. For example, each season of *Soul City* is targeted to particular social problems impacting the target audience, and these social problems constitute the central narrative arcs for the season. In the case of *Shuga*, specific concerns are identified, with larger pedagogical aims being explored over the length of the season, and more niche concerns explored over one or several episodes. Ultimately, the interventionist goal for entertainment-education programming consists of wide scale societal awareness of an issue and, more importantly, wide scale behavioural change at the level of the individual so as to effect change at a societal level. The third characteristic of contemporary entertainment-education programming occurs at the level of interpellation and distribution. In order to instrumentalise the intended social changes laid out through the pedagogical goals and delivered through robust formative, process and summative research design, the media product must be able to successfully engage the target audience. In the case of *Shuga*, the target audience of SSA youth are interpellated by appealing to an aspirational identificatory regime which situates the narratives in an upwardly-mobile, urban, middle-class, educated milieu. Further, the use of locally-popular celebrities, music and styles engages the target audience.

⁶³ Suruchi Sood, Tiffany Menard, and Kim Witte, 'The Theory Behind Entertainment-Education', in Arvind Singhal, et al. (eds), *Entertainment-Education and Social Change: History, Research, and Practice*, Mahwah, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.119.

⁶⁵ Arvind Singhal and Everett M. Rogers, 'The Status of Entertainment-Education Worldwide', *ibid.*, p.^pp.Cited Pages|. p. 6.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Whilst the first season of *Shuga* is obviously situated firmly within the context of entertainment-education, its initial runaway success and subsequent relocations to Nigeria and South Africa are demonstrative of the ways in which entertainment-education projects can graduate from pure entertainment-education focus and become commercial cultural products in their own right. However, what is particularly interesting about the *Shuga* franchise are the specific entertainment-education narratives that emerge through the series and the ways in which they are articulated in relation to temporality, spatiality and biopolitics. The sharp contrasts in health promotion messaging regarding HIV/AIDS between various geopolitical contexts is also demonstrative of the ways in which the ongoing AIDS crisis is mediated by geopolitical and cultural borders despite the virus' ability to traverse borders.

Space: Rural/Urban Divide and pan-African Modernity

All seasons of *Shuga* engage with notions of spatiality in relation to the tension and interplay between the urban and the rural. A significant narrative element of *Shuga* is its setting within the African metropolises of Nairobi, Lagos and Johannesburg, all of which have a significant and growing middle-class population, yet are also products of neoliberal urban planning strategies which involve significant privatisation, particularly in relation to education, transport and residential development. As Vanessa Watson argues in her analysis of urban planning strategies in Africa, African cities have been articulated as “the last development frontier” by the international property development sector, and developers and governments alike tout utopian ideals of a “rising” Africa symbolised by glass and steel towers through “visions [of] future [African] cities which reflect images of Dubai, Singapore or Shanghai.”⁶⁷ Such ideals are exemplified in the *Nairobi 2030 Metro Strategy*, which, as Watson notes, “aims to make Nairobi ‘a world class African metropolis’ and the emphasis on world class appears in almost every section of the document.”⁶⁸ A common trope in these utopian urban plans for new, “modern” African cities is the use of high-modernist architecture and the tendency to describe the ways in which the new developments will be separate from the chaos and disorder of the rest of the city. Many of the plans situate the new developments outside

⁶⁷ Vanessa Watson, 'African Urban Fantasies: Dreams or Nightmares?', *Environment and Urbanization*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2013, p. 1.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.3-4.

of the city proper or in reclaimed land, as satellite cities which function as gated communities in which residents do not need to interact with the rest of the population.

The main setting for *Shuga* is in and around college campuses, nightclubs and bars, shopping malls, and private homes; that is, spaces of youth culture, modernity, and aspirational middle-class consumer identity. The representation of both Nairobi and Lagos in *Shuga* and *ShugaNaija* respectively is, for the most part, restricted to zones of affluence. Whilst most of the episodes are located in urban middle-class settings, there are a few exceptions which are used to represent the potential for social mobility and the inherent risks for young women that urban modernity may entail.

In the first season of *Shuga*, which consisted of three half-hour episodes, the storyline centres around Ayira, portrayed by Lupita Nyong'o.⁶⁹ Ayira is attending college with ambitions to work in the advertising industry, has a long-term boyfriend, Ty, also attending college, and is portrayed as coming from a poorer background than that of her friends/housemates Violet and Sindi. The first episode, 'Friday Nights' (2009), opens with Ayira being dropped off in a car by an older man who kisses her and asks when he will see her again. She then makes her way through a chaotic marketplace in heels and an expensive looking minidress, along unpaved streets to her mother's house, where she sneaks cash into her mother's apron, and gives her a package of luxury toiletries from the hotel where she spent the night before with her older man. Her brief visit ends with her promising to visit more often, and she catches the ubiquitous vehicular symbol of contemporary Nairobi, a musical *matatu* minibus adorned with flashy imagery and thumping beats, which takes her home to her comparably cosmopolitan apartment, where she has a brief interaction with her housemates.

From the outset, Ayira is situated in relation to a specific urban socioeconomic geography which is mutually constitutive with a particularly modern temporality. Firstly, the juxtaposition of the flashy Ayira making her way through the thoroughfare to visit her mother in a poorer part of the city, as the camera languidly pans across her legs in close-range shots and peers from afar in long-range shots from above at the mismatch between the setting and the subject, contextualises the prior scene in which

⁶⁹ Lupita Nyong'o rose to fame after *Shuga*, winning the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for her role as Patsey in *12 Years a Slave*. Nyong'o subsequently served as Producer from Season 2 onwards.

she gets out of the older man's car. The second way in which the mutual constitution of spatiality and temporality and the articulation of a modern Nairobi as a space of youth is made evident occurs when Ayira steps into the *matutu* in her mother's neighbourhood and digitised imagery overlays the shot to intimate an SMS exchange between Ayira and her housemates. The *matutu*, decked out in flashy colours and playing Kenyan *genge* (afrobeat) music, transports Ayira from the place of her upbringing to a location that is coded as more "modern" and more middle-class, a wealthier area of the city. Inside the apartment she shares with Violet and Sindi are the trappings of a modern urban twenty-somethings culture which bespeak a cosmopolitan sense of anywhere-ness, in contrast to the codification of her mother's neighbourhood and her mother's house, which are represented as simultaneously lower-class and Kenyan; her mother is in the garden hand-washing clothes, dressed in a less Western style, with her hair wrapped in a bright patterned headscarf, in contrast to the more Western attire of Ayira's high heel shoes, blue jeans, and short dresses.

Another significant trope explored in the series is that of the underprivileged rural woman migrating from a rural, village setting to the big city, and in the process, becoming exposed to a range of factors which increase risk to HIV transmission and compromise safety. As such, *Shuga* can be understood as presenting a contemporary Kenyan/Nigerian modification of the spatialisation of risk that is present in the Euro-American AIDS film, as discussed in earlier chapters, whereby the City, articulated in terms of being a gay utopia in contrast to the homophobia and lack of social mobility of small-town middle America, is transformed by HIV/AIDS into an AIDS dystopia, and the countryside ascribes a sense of parochiality and familiar safety away from the risks and dangers that the City presents. In *Shuga: Love, Sex, Money*, this trope is most evident in the character of Kipepeo, a young girl from the town of Malindi on the southern coast of Kenya, who wins a local singing competition. Kipepeo uses the prize money from the competition to travel to Nairobi to enter another singing competition. The opening scene of episode 5 ('Money, Part I') of *Shuga: Love, Sex, Money* sees Kipepeo introduced by the competition host in Malindi, and then travelling through town in a rickshaw. The setting is noticeably different from the urban, middle-class setting in Nairobi. As she packs her bags, Kipepeo's mother warns her that her beauty "could be a blessing or a curse" and encourages her to take care in Nairobi around men. Kipepeo then travels by bus to Nairobi, where she is lambasted by the competition

judges for being “too rural”; she faints onstage. Desperate, she seeks out ex-thug Angelo, who she met at a cousin’s wedding in Malindi and who introduced himself as a music producer. Eventually, Kipepeo moves in with Angelo and they develop a romantic relationship, however both are impacted by a lack of opportunity and inescapable poverty in the Nairobi slum, in addition to the narrative trope of “following one’s dream.” In a bar, she meets another self-styled music producer, who solicits her into providing him with sexual services. In the end, it is only through Kipepeo’s sex work that her and Angelo are able to sustain themselves in Nairobi. Unaware of the source of Kipepeo’s income, when Angelo finally finds out, he convinces her to quit, and the two get engaged.

The trope of the young rural woman migrating to the city and subsequently falling into danger is repeated in *ShugaNaija* through the character of Princess, the younger sister of main character Sophie. Princess arrives in Lagos from their unspecified home village to visit Sophie at college, however Sophie does not want her to stay, and she ends up hiding out in a boy’s dorm room at the school without Sophie knowing. Princess aspires to the same “flashy” existence that Sophie has become accustomed to in Lagos, and similarly engages in transactional sex work in order to obtain such a lifestyle. As I discuss later in relation to the representation of transactional sex in *Shuga* and *ShugaNaija*, the dangers of the big city soon reach Princess, and the intimation is that she should have remained in the relative safety of the village.

Across the franchise, the mobility of characters between Nairobi, Lagos and Johannesburg similarly produces a sense of pan-African modernity between these key Anglophone cities. In the case of *Shuga: Down South*, the fictional township of Zenzele in Johannesburg and the real locale of Braamfontein articulate a distinctly South African urban modernity. Braamfontein is a formerly run-down suburb on the northern fringe of Johannesburg’s central business district which has recently gentrified due to generous Urban Development Zone (UDZ) tax incentives put in place by the Johannesburg Development Agency with the aim of regenerating urban spaces deemed “dangerous” and situating Johannesburg as a “world class African city.”⁷⁰ Urban life in South African townships is normalised through the representation, in *Shuga: Down South*, of

⁷⁰ Beavon in Gijsbert Hoogendoorn and James Gregory, 'Instagrammers, Urban Renewal and the Johannesburg Inner City', *Urban Forum*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2016.

family homes in a range of class contexts, including shanty compounds and middle-class brick-and-mortar houses. Indeed, the township of Zenzele is depicted as a safe, aspirational middle-class environment, importantly without contrast to the gated communities, presence of armed private security guards and fears of a “culture of violence” which permeate articulations of Johannesburg’s urban environment in the post-apartheid era.⁷¹

The representation of urban and rural space in *Shuga* and *ShugaNaija* is illustrative of two things. Firstly, the zones of middle-class affluence in both Nairobi and Lagos and the relative absence of spaces of disadvantage in both of these settings is demonstrative of the increasing segregation of urban spaces along class lines which has become characteristic of the “urbanisation of neoliberalism.”⁷² As Brenner and Theodore note, neoliberal urban governance entails the “creation of new privatised spaces of elite/corporate consumption” and the “creation of gated communities, urban enclaves, and other ‘purified’ spaces of social reproduction.”⁷³ Whilst a significant proportion of the people living in both Lagos and Nairobi are living in poverty and in urban slums, the representation of these African metropolises in *Shuga* and *ShugaNaija* can be read as a vision of aspiration in addition to being understood as targeting a particular class-based segment of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa. Secondly, by emphasising the dangers inherent in the modernising cities, and, in particular, the dangers to young rural migrant women in particular, the programs allow for a cautionary tale which acts as a pedagogic moment *vis-a-vis* engagement in transactional sex.

Body: Runs Girls, Good Time Girls and Blessers

As I have shown in the previous section, the spatiotemporal representation of Nairobi in *Shuga* and Lagos in *ShugaNaija* presents both cities in relation to a sense of

⁷¹ See: Lindsay Bremner, 'Bounded Spaces: Demographic Anxieties in Post-Apartheid Johannesburg', *Social Identities*, vol. 10, no. 4, 2004.; Ingrid Palmay, Janine Rauch, and Graeme Simpson, 'Violent Crime in Johannesburg', in Richard Tomlinson, et al. (eds), *Emerging Johannesburg: Perspectives on the Postapartheid City*, New York, Routledge, 2003.; Teresa Dirsuweit, 'Johannesburg: Fearful City?', *Urban Forum*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2002.; Karina Landman and Martin Schönteich, 'Urban Fortresses: Gated Communities as a Reaction to Crime', *African Security Review*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2002.

⁷² Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, 'Cities and the Geographies of “Actually Existing Neoliberalism”', *Antipode*, vol. 34, no. 3, 2002, p. 375.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.371.

pan-African modernity and codes this modernity through zones of middle-class consumption and youth culture. Further, given that the narratives are focused on middle-class urban youth and largely ignore working-class and the urban poor - which constitute a majority of people in both Kenya and Nigeria - it can be understood that *Shuga*'s target audience comprises of middle-class and aspirational youth in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Conventional global public health wisdom purports that health outcomes at a population level are improved concomitant with a rise in wealth. The received wisdom relating to this common refrain is that rising wealth is a prerequisite to an increased educational and occupational attainment, an increase in living standards, greater literacy and ability to understand and interpret public health messaging, greater exposure to such messaging, better access to reproductive health services and health services in general. Correlational studies demonstrate that, singularly, these factors can reduce HIV seroconversion rates. However, Ashley Fox argues that recent empirical analyses demonstrate that, contrary to these commonly-held public health notions, wealthier countries in SSA have a higher HIV risk, and that wealthier individuals within those countries have a higher risk than poorer individuals. Fox refers to a number of recent studies which provide explanations for this confounding inverse determinacy relationship between wealth and HIV serostatus, and illustrates that a rise in wealth can correlate with a rise in a range of proximal risks, including an increase in the number of sexual partners and in the likelihood of premarital sex.⁷⁴

The public health literature on transactional sex in particular is an area in which public health narratives of risk and socioeconomic status are contradicted by the empirical data. The narrative of 'survival sex' or 'sex for favours' which situates women in SSA in a position of reliance upon older and wealthier men for survival (and thereby in a position of greater risk of HIV seroconversion), Fox argues, is being problematised, particularly in relation to the upwardly mobile and aspirational middle classes in urban locations; Fox refers to LeClerc-Madlala's 2003 study which mobilised the term "consumption sex" in preference for transactional sex to illustrate the ways in which informal sexual exchanges are conducted for access to material and consumer

⁷⁴ Ashley M Fox, 'The Social Determinants of HIV Serostatus in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Inverse Relationship between Poverty and HIV?', *Public Health Reports*, vol. 125, no. 4, 2010, p. 17.

goods as opposed to money for survival.⁷⁵ Kipepeo's narrative in *Shuga: Love, Sex, Money* situates her clearly within the context of "sex for survival" and discursively produces a mutually constitutive spatio-temporal modality which frames the urban as simultaneously modern and risky in contrast to the safety and traditionalism, and articulates a social position through which a modern identity can be crafted through transactional sex. The narrative of the rural girl moving to the big city and engaging in transactional sex arrangements is repeated in *ShugaNaija* through the character of Princess, who moves from her home province to visit her sister Sophie in Lagos. However, it is important to note that the rural-urban migration trope is not the only representation of transactional sex, nor the most prevalent: the subject position of the 'runs girl' is also present in *Shuga* and *ShugaNaija*, which complicates and problematises the conventional understanding of motivations, class positionality and cultural articulation of transactional sex in SSA.

The 'runs girl'/'good time girl' storyline appears in *Shuga (Season One)*, *Shuga: Love, Sex Money (Season Two)* and *ShugaNaija (Season Three)*, and articulates the ways in which informal transactional sexual relationships can expose women to HIV in both the Kenyan and Nigerian contexts. Indeed, the name of the series appears as an allusion to the practice, whereby richer older men are known as 'sugar daddies', and the incorporation of the runs girl storylines are no doubt related to the perceived transmission risks for the target audience of urban, middle-class, educated young people in Anglophone Africa. This narrative is continued in *Shuga: Down South*, where the localised terminology of 'blessers' is used to refer to older men who 'bless' younger women with gifts in exchange for sex. Importantly, a mutually constitutive relationship between space and time discursively produces the identity category of the runs girl in the *Shuga* franchise in relation to class and modernity. Further, the backgrounds of each of the women in the show engaging in transactional sexual relationships provides a relative diversity of contexts in which transactional sex occurs and the ways in which it can lead to seroconversion.

Two common perceptions regarding transactional sex in Africa - that they are "primarily resorted to as survival strategies by economically disadvantaged women" and

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.18., see also Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, 'Transactional Sex and the Pursuit of Modernity', *Social Dynamics*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2003.

that “sex and money are always exchanged in these relationships” - are reliant on problematic assumptions and misconceptions about the role of material transfer in sexual relationships in many African cultures and a simplistic analysis of the drivers of these forms of sex work. Masvawure argues that the extant scholarship on the matter “links the practice almost exclusively to economic survival ... and, in doing so, often portrays the women as victims.”⁷⁶ Conversely, in Masvawure’s ethnographic study, it was found that transactional sex was not a practice associated with subsistence or survival, but rather was used by lower-middle class female students “to attain an otherwise elusive modern lifestyle” and by upper-middle class students (to maintain an already privileged class position).⁷⁷ Masvawure conducted ethnographic research at a residential, urban campus of the University of Zimbabwe, located in an affluent area of the Zimbabwean capital Harare, with ten young female students from lower- and upper-middle class backgrounds who were engaged in, or had formerly been engaged in, transactional sex. Masvawure identifies three problematic assumptions which the extant literature on transactional sex in SSA take for granted. Firstly, that it is merely sex and money which exchange hands in these arrangements; Masvawure recalls Luise White’s influential 1990 study *The Comforts of Home* regarding female sex workers in Nairobi in which non-sexual services such as lodgings, cooking, cleaning, meals and companionship were routinely provided to clients and were generally as valued as the sexual services.⁷⁸

The second assumption is that transactional sexual relationships are “necessarily exploitative;” Masvawure argues that the exchange of material goods in many African cultures “is commonly used as an indicator of partner commitment ... the transfer of material goods from a man to woman is therefore crucial rather than inimical to many intimate relationships.”⁷⁹

The third and most important assumption identified by Masvawure is that transactional sex is only viewed “through a single, narrow lens” in which it is

⁷⁶ Tsitsi Masvawure, “I Just Need to be Flashy on Campus’: Female Students and Transactional Sex at a University in Zimbabwe”, *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, vol. 12, no. 8, 2010, p. 858.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ See Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009.

⁷⁹ Masvawure, p. 858.

understood primarily as a strategy for survival by poor women.⁸⁰ Conceding that in many cases in Zimbabwe poor women do indeed participate in transactional sex for survival, Masvawure argues that a generalist lens on the matter obfuscates the motivations behind relatively wealthy young women engaging in transactional sexual relationships. This highlights the need for a greater level of nuance and granularity in the discourse surrounding sex work in SSA to allow for a delineation between what Mark Hunter refers to as “sex linked to subsistence” compared with “sex linked to consumption.”⁸¹ Further, it is important to disentangle these forms of sexual exchange from the monolithic concept of “prostitution,” as Hunter articulates:

Transactional sex has a number of similarities to prostitution. In both cases, non-marital sexual relationships, often with multiple partners, are underscored by the giving of gifts or cash. Transactional sex, however, differs in important ways: participants are constructed as “girlfriends” and “boyfriends” and not “prostitutes” and “clients”, and the exchange of gifts for sex is part of a broader set of obligations that might not involve a predetermined payment. The use of the concept “transactional sex” is intended neither to maintain inflexible distinctions between the categories of “prostitution”/“transactional sex”/“non-transactional sex” (indeed, sex, like all embodied practices, is always simultaneously material and meaningful in complex ways), nor to naturalise heterosexual sex.⁸²

Within the specific geopolitical, cultural, historical and economic context of Hunter’s study, which focussed on forms of transactional sex in Mandeni, a city in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa, a clear delineation in the motivations for engaging in transactional sex can be found that situate the issue in both spatial and temporal terms. In the informal settlements, transactional sex was more likely to be conceptualised as “sex linked to subsistence” and was related to the economic class of the women involved and the comparative dearth of economic opportunity available in the settlements for these women. In contrast, in the wealthier townships, transactional sex was linked to consumption.

The delineation between prostitution and transactional sex is not limited to its conceptualisation on the part of external researchers but is actually driven by the self-identification strategies of the women involved in the practice: Oludayo Tade and

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.859.

⁸¹ Mark Hunter, "The Materiality of Everyday Sex: Thinking beyond "Prostitution", *African Studies*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2002, p. 101.

⁸² Ibid.

Adeshewa Jheminat Adekoya's ethnographic research on transactional sex in Nigerian universities found that their participants vehemently reject the label of 'prostitute' in favour of an identification with the distinct cultural category of 'runs girl'. Tade and Adekoya argue that

'runs' is the redefinition of the act of transactional sex in ivory towers by negating prostitution seen as a negative label. Rather than seeing themselves as prostitutes, these female undergraduates categorised themselves as a distinct group from prostitutes. Runs-girls, as they call themselves, is conceived as a social group of educated, classy, choosy female undergraduates who rely on their erotic advantages to cope with economic, social, political and labour market strains. Their view is predicated on the notion that 'female runs' in the ivory tower is selective of clients, the privileged class whom they call 'aristo.'"⁸³

The classed stratification of transactional sex relationships here is important. The women involved in the practice make strides to ensure that the practices in which they engage are differentiated from the label of 'prostitution' and that the distinct social category of 'runs girl' enjoys a privileged class position within the social ecology of the college campus. Tade and Adekoya go on to note that "doing 'runs' is to be ranked among the 'high class' ladies on campus" and situate the practice as a "critical survival life investment strategy."⁸⁴ The delineation between the motivations of the campus 'runs girls' (in *Shuga: Ayira*; in *ShugaNaija*: Sophie) and the relationship between young women and their 'blessers' (in *Down South*: Tsholo) in comparison to the representation of the 'good time girl' (in *Shuga*: Violet) and, later, the underprivileged rural migrant woman engaging in transactional sex, (in *Shuga: Love, Sex, Money*: Kipepeo; in *ShugaNaija*: Princess) is striking. As noted, in Season One Ayira's class position is revealed as conflicted, articulated visually by the juxtaposition of her flashy dress and appearance as she makes her way through the market to her mother's house. Stepping out of an expensive car and kissing the man accompanying her, we are to understand that she is involved in transactional sex. Yet the morality of this narrative is complicated when she arrives at her mother's house and the relationship between Ayira's engagement in transactional sex and her family is made clear; she discusses with her mother that her absentee father has not been sending his child support money, and surreptitiously passes cash to her mother, who is unaware of how it was earned.

⁸³ Oludayo Tade and Adeshewa Adekoya, 'Transactional Sex and the "Aristo" Phenomenon in Nigerian Universities', *Human Affairs*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2012, p. 245.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.253.

When Ayira goes home to her apartment with Sindi and Violet, the conversation between the three housemates normalises Ayira's interaction with her so-called 'uncle'. Later, as they are getting dressed for town, their conversation tends again towards the topic of 'sugar daddies', as Violet receives a text from her "Minister of Communications"⁸⁵ that he wants to take her away for the weekend. When Sindi and Ayira joke about him being short, fat, and ugly, she retorts in Sheng⁸⁶ that he might be short, fat, and ugly, "but when he stands on his wallet he's Michael Jordan!" Whilst Violet and Sindi party in a Nairobi nightclub, Ayira is working as a waitress at a fancy restaurant, and serves Felix, the head of an advertising company, whom she met earlier at college giving a presentation to apply for an internship. He invites her to his house, where she sleeps with him in order to win the internship position. Through this articulation of the 'runs girl' subject position, a complicated picture emerges which demonstrates what recent empirical and ethnographic research has evidenced: that, although in some instances transactional sex in urban SSA is related to subsistence, in many instances it represents an opportunity for young lower- and upper-middle class women to stake a claim to a modern identity through the acquisition of material goods and the exposure to lifestyle and entertainment environments they may otherwise not have access to. This relationship between transactional sex and aspirations of modern globalised subject position are recurrent and important throughout the *Shuga* franchise.

In Season One, Ayira's use of transactional sex to support her family, increase her socioeconomic mobility, and gain access to a coveted employment opportunity situate her in contrast to her friend and housemate Violet, who is also engaged in transactional sex relationships. The contrast stems from Violet's represented class position which, as we later learn, is coherently upper-middle class, but also from her relationship to consumption and pleasure. At the end of the first episode, on their way

⁸⁵ Violet maintains relationships with a number of "ministers": her "Minister of Finance" who provides her with money, her "Minister of Communications" who provides her with a smartphone, etc.

⁸⁶ Sheng is a slang language based mostly on Swahili and incorporating many English words which emerged in Nairobi slum districts but has since been popularised among youth through its widespread use in hiphop music. Sheng operates as a lingua franca for daily communication in Kenya, and can be understood in terms of "glocality" in that it is simultaneously "Western" (through its use of English) and specifically 'African' (through its use of Swahili). Most of the dialogue in seasons one and two of *Shuga* are in English (in order for a broader audience base across Anglophone Africa) with regular incorporation of Sheng phrases and words, subtitled in English. Similarly, *Shuga Naija* is mostly in English, with occasional local Nigerian English phrases and words, however dialogue between youth and older family members is often conducted in Hausa, Yoruba or Igbo (the languages of the eponymous major ethnic groups in Nigeria).

back from the nightclub, Violet is driving in a BMW with a few of her male friends, standing up through the sunroof drinking from a large bottle of Jim Beam whiskey, drunkenly screaming “I LOVE YOU NAIROBI!” The car has to pull over so she can be sick, and after this they continue drinking, with the boys encouraging her to drink more: “just one more Vio, one more for me!” Through this representation, Violet is constructed in relation to the SSA trope of the ‘good time girl’. Dina Ligaga discusses the trope of the ‘good time girl’ in the context of Kenyan media and popular cultural discourses, historicising the trope and the ways in which it functions in Kenyan popular culture are publicly debated and constituted. Ligaga situates the discourses surrounding the ‘good time girl’ as media narratives which “circulate as cautionary tales” in order “for the media to ‘tame’ what is being constructed as rampant sexualities among young women in Kenya.”⁸⁷ For Ligaga, the “good time girl ... occupies seemingly contradictory positions in the contemporary Kenyan public imaginary.”⁸⁸ Ligaga draws on Stephanie Newell’s articulation of the figure of the good time girl in African popular culture⁸⁹ as “a hoarder and private accumulator *par excellence*” which is used in media narratives to “explore the story of a beautiful young woman’s misuse of her sexuality in exchange for material wealth.”⁹⁰ Crucially, as Ligaga demonstrates by referring to the Nigerian film scholar Onookome Okome’s work on the figure of the good time girl in Nollywood films, this figure is firmly situated within a geospatial and temporal interrelation in which it is “impossible to imagine the good time girl outside the space of the city, where social change is rapid, and where the links with colonial modernity are clear.”⁹¹ Here we can see how the popular social anxieties about the impact of modernity on female sexuality is constructed in popular culture through the figure of the good time girl and the use of this narrative trope as both a cautionary moral tale and as a pedagogical tool for both HIV prevention and to assuage cultural anxieties about shifts in female sexualities in Kenya.

⁸⁷ Dina Ligaga, ‘Mapping Emerging Constructions of Good Time Girls in Kenyan Popular Media’, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2014, p. 249.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.250.

⁸⁹ See Stephanie Newell, *Readings in African Popular Fiction*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002.

⁹⁰ Ligaga, p. 250.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

In the end, for both Ayira and Violet, their forays into being ‘good time girls’ in Nairobi do not end well. Ayira discovers that her aristo Felix is actually the father of one of her classmates, Virginia, who then informs her that both she and her father are HIV positive. Ayira must then tell her boyfriend Ty that she has potentially exposed him to HIV. Violet, on the other hand, contracts HIV through casual sex on the night of her drunken exploits. The show takes important steps to reiterate key public health messaging around responsibilities of disclosure, the necessity for regular testing and condom use, and that HIV can be managed as a chronic condition with antiretroviral therapy. Further, through the character of Virginia, the issue of HIV stigma is crucially addressed, reiterating that HIV is a manageable condition and that seropositive people should not be stigmatised or afraid to disclose their status to intimate partners. However, given the show is situated within the paradigm of Education-Entertainment and is focussed on HIV prevention and awareness for young middle-class urbanites in the SSA region, the consequences of young women engaging in transactional sex or casual sex are clearly constructed within the same rubric as the media articulation of the ‘good time girl’ as described by Ligaga. What is shown in *Shuga* is that the accumulated benefits available to women engaging in transactional sex arrangements - social prestige, material goods, a modern subject position, future job security - come with a price, whether that be emotional or virological.

The narratives of the ‘runs girls’ and ‘good time girls’ in *Shuga* and *ShugaNaija* are but one example of the ways in which characterisations of subject positions and individual behaviours are given primacy within the context of the program. As behaviour change and broader awareness of HIV/AIDS are the primary goals of the program as an entertainment-education intervention, this is perfectly understandable, however the deployment of these narrativisations in the broader context of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment in SSA is particularly noteworthy. At a systemic level, the interventions sought through the program mirror the interventions recommended by both domestic and supranational organisations to reduce HIV transmission rates in the SSA region. From a biopolitical standpoint, these narratives illustrate how the neoliberal subject is interpellated and discursively produced with the view that the individuated neoliberal subject will modify aspects of their sexual behaviour. As I demonstrate in the following section, the production of the neoliberal sexual actor and the rhetoric of individual responsibility which is advocated both for and within the SSA region

produces a “violent cartography”⁹² which demarcates certain geopolitically-located bodies as being in need of biopolitical governance through behavioural self-discipline whilst demarcating other bodies as being able to access various forms of risk and pleasure safely through the use of chemoprophylactic strategies such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

Body: Neoliberal Biopolitics and Sexual Health Pedagogy

At the level of biopolitics, *Shuga*’s ultimate aim of increased awareness/discussion and actualised behavioural change among adolescents in the SSA region clearly constitute a prime example of the ways in which popular media is leveraged by both domestic (ie. the Kenyan and Nigerian national AIDS bodies) and supranational organisations (ie. PEPFAR, HFG and the MTV Staying Alive Foundation) to produce a neoliberal biopolitical subjectivity which insists on the primacy of individual behaviour change to prevent HIV transmission at a population level. Given that these aims are clearly stipulated throughout the project, it is of no surprise that we can elucidate messaging that seeks to interpellate an ideal neoliberal subject who is educated in methods of self-discipline and rhetorics of individual responsibility; after all, this remains the goal of entertainment-education programming in development contexts. What is particularly striking in relation to the ways in which these messages are played out in the context of the SSA region, however, is the clear geopolitical imbalance of HIV interventions at a global level. In this section, I address some of the ways in which the subjectivity of the “neoliberal sexual actor”⁹³ is discursively produced in *Shuga* and *ShugaNaija*. In particular, the centrality of the “ABC” prevention methodology championed by the second Bush administration’s PEPFAR programs, and its promotion of abstinence as a HIV prevention tool, are contextualised in relation to issues of donor aid and the forced implementation of the Washington Consensus in the region which have produced the conditions in which the HIV pandemic could thrive on the continent. Crucially, the disparities in intervention methods between ‘Pattern One’ and ‘Pattern Two’ countries constitutes a cartographic delineation of biopolitical governance which affords certain bodies the right to

⁹² Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War*.

⁹³ Adam.

(pharmaceutically-enabled) corporeal pleasure whilst insisting that others must practice modes of restraint. In *Shuga: Down South*, a slightly different approach is taken, as the serodiscordant couple Femi and Sheila discuss PrEP as a potential prophylactic in addition to their regimen of TasP and condoms. Further, the localisation of the series to the context of South Africa and the pressing concerns for the South African government witness a shift in *Shuga: Down South* towards addressing issues of gender-based violence and teen pregnancy. In parallel to the broadcast of the program in South Africa, a special co-production of MTV's wildly successful *Sixteen and Pregnant* franchise was made featuring three young women living in South African townships, following their pregnancies from the third trimester through to childbirth. In addition, a short series titled *Shuga: In Real Life* was broadcast, interspersing interviews with the actors from the show and interviews with young people in South Africa who inhabit the identity positions the show portrays: serodiscordant couples, gay men, and the 'blesee/blesser' relationship.

The global AIDS pandemic emerged conterminously with a certain set of specific economic and political conditions that were predicated on a range of crises throughout the 1970s and the emergence of a new dominant economic and political paradigm of neoliberalism. In the context of the SSA region, the widespread implementation of Washington Consensus reforms as a *quid pro quo* for receiving aid money from supranational organisations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank resulted in significant reductions in public spending on infrastructure, health and education in the developing world, a liberalisation of trade, and the privatisation of state infrastructure and services. Colleen O'Manique contextualises the AIDS pandemic in the SSA region as "globalisation's pandemic," arguing that the biomedical construction of HIV/AIDS, which "reduces the AIDS pandemic to its individual clinical and behavioural dimensions," is consistent with a neoliberal form of governance, which similarly "posits that the rational, isolated individual is the fundamental unit of society, and the market, the natural and just distributor of societies' needs."⁹⁴ As I demonstrate in Chapter Four, the subjectivity of the "neoliberal sexual actor" discursively produces, in the west and in particular in relation to gay men, a "doctrine of individual responsibility" that is "so thoroughly embedded in gay

⁹⁴ O'Manique, pp. 5-7.

communities, that when men do seroconvert, they nearly always locate themselves in a discourse of personal responsibility, blaming themselves for having done so.”⁹⁵ The rhetoric of personal responsibility and the manageability of risk *vis-à-vis* the consumption of pharmaceuticals in order to minimise risk to oneself and to others is broadly advocated in the context of ‘Pattern One’ countries such as the United States and Australia. In these contexts, those at risk are encouraged and, often, financially supported to adopt chemoprophylactic strategies of self-protection to immunise themselves against the risk of HIV seroconversion. In contrast to this mobilisation of the rhetoric of individual responsibility, which I explore in much greater detail in relation to cultures of barebacking and pornographic representation in the next chapter, here I want to interrogate how the same ideology is put into practice in the Global South and in particular in the SSA region where HIV prevalence rates are much higher, wealth disparities greater, and purchasing power parity considerably lower than in the global north. Here, rather than an advocacy for the broad adoption of first-line HIV treatment for seropositives - let alone for immunitarian implementation of antiretroviral therapy among seronegatives, as we are seeing with the implementation of PrEP in the United States and Australia - the biomedical construction of HIV/AIDS individualises risk to the point where individual behaviour change is articulated as an effective method of prevention at a population level. O’Manique summarises the disparity between approaches at a global level in relation to political economy:

In the west, where AIDS is seen largely as a chronic condition, AIDS research and activism has focused overwhelmingly on the drug access problem, while in the Third World, it has been largely taken for granted that widespread treatment is not “cost-effective”, and so prevention takes centre stage, along with individual “self-help” and empowerment programmes.⁹⁶ (2004, p.9).

In addition to the exposure of a range of government health messages pertaining to concerns of HIV testing, access to HIV services and clarification on routes of transmission, *Shuga* and *ShugaNaija* extensively discursively produce a neoliberal subjectivity concomitant with O’Manique’s characterisation of the primacy of behavioural change and individual ‘self-help’ in HIV prevention campaigns in SSA. As a behavioural change project, the series aims to encourage youth in the SSA region to

⁹⁵ Adam, p. 336.

⁹⁶ O’Manique, p. 9.

imbibe the rhetoric of individual responsibility, and its portrayal of the risks and dangers inherent in sexual activities constitutes an individualised neoliberal intervention that seeks to promote the adoption of techniques of the self in order to reduce risk. Two narrative tropes in the series illustrate this point. Firstly, the narrative trope of the reformed runs-girl/good time girl, embodied through the characters of Ayira and Violet in *Shuga* and Sophie in *ShugaNaija*, articulate the view that young women engaging in activities such as casual sex, transactional sex and partying must either be punished or able to seek redemption. Violet's redemption is achieved by the acceptance of her responsibility in seroconverting. As noted earlier, *Shuga* makes use of a transmedia narrative strategy; in the programme, the character of Violet is successful in gaining a contributor position with SWAG Magazine in Season Two, in which she pens an article coming out as HIV positive. The article is published on the MTV Shuga website, and is illustrative of the broader narrative attempts to articulate Violet's seroconversion in relation to her characterisation as a runs-girl in Nairobi, and serves to demonstrate her redemption:

When I was diagnosed positive, I felt awful for a few weeks. I cried. I shouted. I was just so mad at myself, at him. I thought it was the end of my world ... I knew when the time was right I would tell [my family] and I hoped they would stick by me, I realised that I could have everything I dreamt of, just not in the same way as I had been going about it. *Real freedom does not come from getting drunk and sleeping around. It comes from making the choices that are best for you.* So my life changed and I've never felt better. Crazy right? No, now I am in control. I date, I go clubbing, I dress up and I look good! Now though, I don't order a cosmopolitan, I order a virgin cocktail. I don't sleep with men on the first date, I now have a 10 date rule and I'll tell you something, it's helped me keep out all the dodgy men. If I make it to the 10th date I tell him my status, so he can make a choice if he wants to keep dating me before we take it to the next level ... Life is like mathematics. We're not only the product of what people add or take away from us but also what we add and take away from our own lives.⁹⁷

Here we can see how the rhetoric of individual responsibility is constructed in such a way to demand various forms of behavioural change which seek to curtail forms of corporeal pleasure in order to immunise oneself from risk. Similarly, in *ShugaNaija*, when the character Sophie, a flashy college campus runs-girl in Lagos, finds a bottle of antiretrovirals in her *aristo* Solomon's hotel room after having condomless sex with him and triggering a chain of events requiring disclosure to other lovers and friends, her

⁹⁷ Shuga, *Exclusive: Vio's SWAG Magazine Article*, <http://www.mtvshuga.com/exclusive-vios-swag-magazine-article/>, 2012, (accessed 20 March). Emphasis added.

redemption is found through her new position as a telephone counsellor at the national HIV helpline and her rejection of her former lifestyle of parties and sex in favour of a more morally pure existence. This moral position is then extended to her treatment of her younger sister Princess, who moves from her home province and eventually ends up as a runs-girl with Solomon. Princess, however, is less fortunate, and is infected with HIV as well as falling pregnant. Here, the narrative elements allow for the knowledge and moral fortitude that Sophie has imbibed through her experiences to be focused on her younger sister Princess, who is seen as not taking responsibility for herself or her unborn baby.

Given that *Shuga* is designed as an entertainment-education programme, The Staying Alive Foundation also produces accompanying materials for educators. In 2014, the Staying Alive Foundation published a Peer Educators' Training Guide available for free on the MTV Shuga website. The guide was produced in conjunction with Joachim Jacobs and Jim Lees, both of the HIV & AIDS peer education programme at the University of the Western Cape in South Africa, and Laura Myers of the Centre for AIDS Development Research and Evaluation in South Africa. The guide centres around *ShugaNaija* (Season 3), and each of the eight episodes of the season function as a coherent HIV peer education lesson, with a brief episode synopsis, elucidation of the key themes of the episode in relation to HIV literacy, and a number of suggested activities. Themes include perception of risk, honesty in sexual relationships, making personal rules and decisions, serostatus disclosure, gender-based violence, pleasure and comfort in sexual relationships, accessing resources, and self-esteem. What differentiates this education programme from others is a focus on emotional intelligence and the mobilisation of affective modes rather than factual knowledge. For example, in the activity notes for session 8, the guide states

While HIV prevention has focused on what we call 'head knowledge', the facts and figures of HIV, what has made these 8 sessions different is our focus on heart knowledge. It is what is in our hearts that determines what we will or will not do with HIV knowledge. Remember what we said in Session 1: You have to love yourself to use a condom. The unresolved wounds in our heart can increase our risk for HIV. If someone feels poorly about themselves, sad, hurt, or lonely, these factors can lead them to look for solutions outside themselves, and those solutions can sometimes bring harm. Like spending the night with a stranger because you need to be loved, even if

you know it is only for the night and it is not real. Or you drink to cope with your words and in doing so set yourself up for more wounds.⁹⁸

These manifestations of a neoliberal subjectivity with a focus on rhetorics of individual responsibility and their associated discourses are not wholly problematic per se, and their utility in relation to a broad entertainment-education strategy is expected. However, in relation to policy and aid funding in the context of the SSA region, and the involvement of US-based charitable and aid organisations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and PEPFAR, what is particularly striking at a systemic level are the ways in which individualising strategies and foci are emphasised in relation to behaviour change in poorer countries whilst the same strategies are put in place in richer countries in relation to chemoprophylactic strategies.

Much has been written on the persistence of ‘ABC’ (abstain, be faithful, use condoms) educational strategies in SSA, particularly in relation to PEPFAR funding during the Bush administration.⁹⁹ PEPFAR funding is not able to be used for campaigns that do not subscribe to this model, which produces disastrous outcomes particularly for sex workers in SSA. From a biopolitical perspective, what is particularly enlightening about both circumcision and abstinence as preventative strategies are the ways in which access to pleasure is marked along geopolitical lines. This is most evident in the ways in which abstinence is promoted as a preventative strategy in both Kenya and Nigeria despite its many failures in preventing the spread of HIV. In contrast, in the United

⁹⁸ Jim Lees, Joachim Jacobs, and Laura Myers, *MTV Shuga Peer Educator's Training Guide*, edited, London, MTV Staying Alive Foundation Inc., 2014, <http://www.mtvshuga.com/mtv-shuga-peer-educators-training-guide-2/>.

⁹⁹ For a useful summary of the debates on the role of the ‘ABC’ approach in Uganda’s successful reduction in new infections, see Elaine M Murphy et al., ‘Was the “ABC” Approach (Abstinence, Being Faithful, Using Condoms) Responsible for Uganda’s Decline in HIV?’, *PLoS Med*, vol. 3, no. 9, 2006. See also:

John W Dietrich, ‘The Politics of PEPFAR: The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief’, *Ethics & International Affairs*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2007.

Ilene Leventhal, ‘PEPFAR: Preaching Abstinence at the Cost of Global Health and Other Misguided Relief Policies’, *Temple International and Comparative Law Journal*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2010.

Justin O Parkhurst, ‘Framing, Ideology and Evidence: Uganda’s HIV Success and the Development of PEPFAR’s “ABC” Policy for HIV Prevention’, *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2012.

Chris Collins, Thomas J Coates, and James Curran, ‘Moving Beyond of the Alphabet Soup of HIV Prevention’, *AIDS*, vol. 22, no. Suppl 2, 2008.

States, chemoprophylactic measures such as PrEP are promoted which enable (if not encourage) the rejection of condom use and a laxity of concurrent sexual partnership.

Joseph Pugliese coined the term ‘geocorpographies’ as a means of encapsulating the idea that “the body, in any of its manifestations, is always geopolitically situated and graphically inscribed by signs, discourses” and “regimes of visibility”, and its “geopolitical markings can only be abstracted through a process of symbolic and political violence.”¹⁰⁰ The disparity between advocating forms of neoliberal individual responsibility discourses in SSA which seek to restrict pleasure versus the implementation of strategies in the west which seek to enable pleasure are illustrative of the ways in which the seropositive body and the body ‘at-risk’ of seroconversion can be read as a geocorpography. In this sense, it is not the virus itself which can be understood as *productive*, but the virus as articulated through neoliberal geopolitics. As such, inequitable global HIV health constitute a pertinent example of what Michael Shapiro calls “violent cartographies;” that is, “historically developed, socially embedded interpretations of identity and space”¹⁰¹ which are “constituted as inter-articulations of geographic imaginaries and antagonisms, based on models of identity-difference.”¹⁰²

Time: Homosexuality, ‘Backwardness’ and ‘Progress’

In *3 Needles*, the AIDS crisis in both ‘Africa’ and ‘China’ were articulated through the colonialist paradigm of ‘backwardness’, whereby the imagined atavism of the racially Othered characters was represented as the key mode of transmission for the virus, and thus the cause of the crisis. In contrast, it was the greed of Denys, who wanted to keep working as a porn actor despite his positive diagnosis, that was framed as his moral failing. In this example, we can see how a specific temporality is constructed around the notion of ‘progress’ and the inability of ‘Africa’ or ‘China’ to be ‘progressive’. The situation of homosexuality in the *Shuga* franchise is similarly telling of the ways in which gay sexuality and identity is coded and configured in post-colonial Africa. The second season of *Shuga* was originally intended to incorporate a gay male character called Rayban as a way of addressing the rising rates of HIV transmission

¹⁰⁰ Pugliese, p. 12.

¹⁰¹ Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War*, p. ix.

¹⁰² Michael J Shapiro, *Cinematic Geopolitics*, London, Routledge, 2009, p. 18.

among MSM communities in Kenya and SSA more broadly. However, the plan to incorporate storylines which were produced with the intention of increasing condom usage among MSM in Kenya were eventually quashed, with executive producer Georgia Arnold noting that the production team “did not want to push boundaries since this is still a very delicate matter in Kenya ... we did not want to make it uncomfortable for a father watching the show with his son only to see two men kissing; people are not yet ready for this.”¹⁰³ What is illuminating in this exchange are the ways in which Kenyan temporality is invoked by the executive producer, and how this relates more broadly to global gay rights discourse and the intransigent link between modernity and homosexuality. In *Heterosexual Africa*, Marc Epprecht argues that, for both anti-imperialist and colonialist reasons, there is an enormous level of heterosexism evident in HIV/AIDS policy across much of SSA.¹⁰⁴ The retraction of the gay storyline from *Shuga: Love Sex Money* can thus be understood in the context of the tensions between Western gay imperialism on the one hand and embedded homophobia at the national level on the other. However, as Epprecht notes, homophobia is not intrinsic or “native” to cultures in Africa, but rather often the result of extant colonial laws. Epprecht argues that this implicit homophobia results in a wilful ignorance of data, particularly in relation to HIV/AIDS prevention and messaging, which constitutes a significant challenge for public health communication strategies in the region.

Frequently celebrated as a success story in dealing with the AIDS crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa, the situation in Uganda is of particular interest here. The Ugandan President Museveni’s enthusiastic support for behavioural intervention and education programmes and adoption of the “ABC” approach - abstain, be faithful, use condoms - was heralded by the Bush administration to be the primary cause of the sharp reduction in HIV cases despite only limited access to antiretroviral programmes. However, the data is relatively unreliable, with results often overstated by the President, and further, the historical specificities in Uganda - where a civil war raged throughout the 1980s which probably played a significant role in reducing the number of people living with HIV at a crucial moment in the AIDS crisis - have largely been ignored when accounting for Uganda’s apparent successes in reducing the rate of seroprevalence.

¹⁰³ Catherine Mukei, "'Invisible' Gay Scenes on Shuga II TV Series', *The Star*, 14 February 2012. Available from: [web.archive.org, http://www.the-star.co.ke/word-is/word-is/62524-invisible-gay-scenes-on-shuga-ii-tv-series](http://web.archive.org/http://www.the-star.co.ke/word-is/word-is/62524-invisible-gay-scenes-on-shuga-ii-tv-series), (accessed 18/2/2012).

¹⁰⁴ Epprecht, p. 5.

Boler and Archer note that, prior to the implementation of PEPFAR, Ugandan President Museveni “launched an ambitious plan to create a national HIV prevention curriculum that would reach every child in every school.”¹⁰⁵ Teacher manuals for Ugandan primary schools included information on supporting girls to say no to sexual intercourse, the importance of being faithful in sexual relationships, and information on safer sex practices, however evangelical groups “demanded the removal of diagrams that illustrated sexual organs” and “insisted on a rewrite based on ethics and morality,” with the US government assisting in the production of new educational resources which “placed sex as an activity which was only acceptable within the confines of heterosexual marriage.”¹⁰⁶ Further, whilst the initial crisis in Uganda typified a “generalised” crisis (that is, Pattern II), the role of American evangelical Christianity in promoting homophobic and socially conservative legislation and social attitudes in Uganda have culminated to result in significantly higher seroprevalence rates for sex workers, injecting drug users, and men who have sex with men. At the same time, HIV prevention messaging in Uganda has been strongly influenced by Museveni’s evangelical Christianity and supported by Western evangelical aid donors to the extent that Uganda has now adopted an “AB without C” approach, whereby abstinence and monogamy are the primary strategies for HIV prevention, with condom access restricted. Punitive approaches to homosexuality (including the *Anti-Homosexuality Bill, 2009* and the *Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2014*, which criminalise homosexual acts, punishable with life imprisonment) further stigmatise men who have sex with men in Uganda, meaning they are less likely to be tested for HIV or seek treatment. Similarly, the anti-prostitution clause to which all aid organisations receiving funds from PEPFAR are subjected severely hampers attempts to provide resources on HIV prevention to these key groups.¹⁰⁷ The influence of American evangelical Christian morality in the health messaging of *Shuga* places the narrative in tension with the temporal aesthetics of the program, further complicated by the neocolonialist outcomes of over a decade of US-led efforts to address HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa. Whereas the characters in *Shuga* are seen living in a fast-paced urban environment and engaging in

¹⁰⁵ Tania Boler and David Archer, *The Politics of Prevention: A Global Crisis in AIDS and Education*, London, Pluto Press, 2008, p. 102.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.103.

¹⁰⁷ Melissa Hope Ditmore and Dan Allman, 'An Analysis of the Implementation of PEPFAR's Anti-Prostitution Pledge and its Implications for Successful HIV Prevention among Organisations working with Sex Workers', *Journal of the International AIDS Society*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2013, p. 1.

various practices and embodiments of a globalised youth culture, sexuality is articulated through a colonially-inflected morality. Through this, African sexuality remains a spectre that must be restricted and controlled through HIV prevention discourses.

Working with a different production company and in a different production environment, *Shuga: Down South* afforded different opportunities for the franchise to represent and explore homosexuality as a theme. Although homosexuality was decriminalised in South Africa in 1998 and the country revels in its reputation as Africa's most gay-friendly nation, *Shuga* is broadcast across the continent, including many countries with laws prohibiting the depiction of homosexuality on television. *Shuga: Down South* features a coming-out storyline and depicts homophobia as a problem for young people which must be overcome. As such, the decision was made to offer two versions of the series: a South African version, with the homosexual storylines intact, and a 'pan-Africa' version in which this storyline has been removed. Yet the relationship between modernity, temporality, homosexuality and class is similarly circumscribed through the distinction between those who are deemed "ready" for a gay storyline and those who are not, as it is only the South African version and not the "pan-African" version which is available to stream on the MTV website or on YouTube. Thus, viewers who are consuming the show via an internet connection are presented with the gay storyline intact.

Whilst the Ugandan example is an outlier and not indicative of Sub-Saharan Africa more broadly, the HIV demographic trends are demonstrative of the fallacy of relying on pattern logic to conceptualise the crisis globally. As increased access to antiretroviral therapy continues in Sub-Saharan Africa and the demographics of HIV and AIDS shift, it is crucial to note that, for many SSA countries formerly understood as dealing with hyper endemic HIV in the general population, the cultural representation of the so-called 'risk groups' emerges as a key battleground.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which HIV/AIDS is culturally mediated through the paradigms of the global network film and education-entertainment media in order to broadly articulate a notion of the pandemic as being truly 'global'. However, as I have shown, by casting HIV/AIDS along lines of spatial and temporal

division which rely on a colonial construction of the virus as having originated in Africa, disseminated through ‘barbaric’ practices and ‘traditional’ forms of knowledge, articulated as a disease which impacts a premodern Other outside of the context of the imagined West, in *3 Needles* a picture emerges, somewhat haphazardly, that despite HIV/AIDS being broadly understood as a globally interconnected pandemic, its spread and impact are tied to practises that are at once racialised and individuated. In this sense, the rapid shift from an epidemic to an endemic era in the Global North which was facilitated by widespread access to treatment actually increased the distance between PLHIV in the Global South and the Global North. Territory, then, is disjunctured by the ‘Protease Moment’ as the realities of global politics and economics increasingly determines which seropositive bodies will be incorporated into the biopolitical mode as consumers and which will be dealt with through a thanatopolitical mode of managing death. Similarly, in the case of MTV’s *Shuga*, the spatio-temporal delineation of zones of risk and immunity coincide with the discursive construction of a neoliberal subjectivity structured along the lines of individual responsibility and represented through the regionally localised framework of the ‘good-time girl’ in which the sexual and social pleasures available to young women in the cosmopolitan centres of Lagos, Johannesburg and Nairobi invariably lead to negative consequences.

Importantly, the articulation of the rhetoric of neoliberal responsibility and the construction of the Global South within the Euro-American imaginary produces a geocorpography of HIV in which certain geopolitically-located bodies are targeted for behavioural change which restricts corporeal pleasure because this is seen as a more ‘economically viable’ solution than a pharmacological alternative. In the next chapter, I address the articulation of seropositivity and chemoprophylactic immunity in relation to the representation of HIV/AIDS within the bareback pornography genre. In doing so, a clear demarcation between the forms of pleasure afforded to geopolitically-constituted bodies emerges.

Chapter Four

Viral Loads: The Emergent eRotics of Pharmacological Sexual Cultures

In 2003, a shocking expose of a monstrous gay male archetype was released, inciting vigorous public debate about HIV and gay male sexuality in the ‘post-AIDS’ era. Louise Hogarth’s documentary film *The Gift* delved into the fringe ‘bugchaser’ subculture, inhabited by seronegative ‘bugchasers’ who desire to be infected with HIV and the seropositive ‘gift-givers’ who infect them. Stylised and promoted as an exposition of a seedy underground world and its deviant citizenry, the film was overwhelmingly successful in its aim of stirring up controversy about the topic; it was shown at more than 170 film festivals, most of which were gay and lesbian film festivals, and received widespread coverage in both mainstream and gay and lesbian media.¹ Replete with an ominous soundtrack and the aesthetic and formal conventions of low-budget current affairs programming (the titles of the program feature an x-ray style image of a male body in profile with a shooting pistol transposed over the erect penis), the documentary opens with the image of the pathetic, remorseful bugchaser on

¹ Dream Out Loud Productions, *The Gift*, dolfilms.org/thegift, 2017.

the 'diary cam', crying to the camera: "when I thought that being [HIV] positive was a 'positive' thing, I thought I was just gonna have a lot of promiscuous, unsafe sex. I didn't know I was going to change so fast. No-one told me." In an interview with Anderson Cooper on CNN, Hogarth asserts that the bugchaser phenomenon is the result of widespread "misperceptions" about HIV and AIDS that are due to AIDS education messaging that seeks to redress HIV stigmatisation. Responding to Cooper's question of what exactly this "wrong messaging" is, Hogarth states: "that HIV is a liveable illness, that it's not a problem to get it. That we've made it so positive to be [HIV] positive." It's a view shared by the Los Angeles based AIDS Healthcare Foundation, who provided Hogarth with her only grant for the film, and whose chairman Michael Weinstein was an outspoken supporter of the film when it was released.² Whilst the bugchaser phenomenon has since been demonstrated as a sensationalist sex panic and Hogarth's film highlighted as an exemplar of using sensationalism and the controversial actions of a minuscule fringe to incite a wider discourse around the regulation of gay sex in the 'post-AIDS' era, the AIDS Healthcare Foundation have not flinched in the decade since. In response to the emergence of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) as a form of HIV prevention in 2012, the AHF have funded a far-reaching campaign of misinformation about the use of PrEP, arguing a return to the sexual promiscuity of the pre-AIDS era should not be the goal of HIV prevention messaging.

The sex panic surrounding the 'bugchaser' phenomenon of the early 2000s seems to indicate that even in the decade following the protease moment, and twenty years since the beginning of the epidemic, the trope of the monstrous AIDS-spreading homosexual vector remains firmly embedded within the cultural consciousness, despite the frame of monstrosity progressively narrowing over time. Indeed, it would appear that 'AIDS Inc.' have become complicit in the reframing of sociosexual threat; the divorce of gay identity from gay sexual practice by way of the 'men who have sex with men' MSM public health discourse presents a triangulation of the fear of the bisexual or closeted gay man transmitting the virus to heterosexual women, whose supposed HIV-naivety would make true the real cultural fear of transmission to heterosexual men and the creation of a generalised epidemic.³ As Gonzalez goes on to note, this triangulation

² Christopher Lisotta, *Return of the Bug Chasers*, in *The Advocate*, edited, 2004, pp. 30-1.

³ Octavio R Gonzalez, 'Tracking the Bugchaser: Giving the Gift of HIV/AIDS', *Cultural Critique*, vol. 75, no. 1, 2010.

recalls the construction of the ultimate ‘innocent victims’ within the schemata of the HIV community, of infected haemophiliacs who contracted HIV through a tainted blood supply; thus, the existence of the sex panic surrounding the bugchaser and gift-giver phenomenon insinuates that we “are still living in, or reliving, this originary era of AIDS.”⁴ It is important to note that in this new HIV temporality, the monstrosity of vectorhood has not been entirely eliminated by the protease moment, nor has it been entirely displaced to an exotic locale, but rather, the new AIDS monster is the pathological virological terrorist. This monstrosity is framed either as the inexplicability of desiring the virus - that is, a form of suicidal ideation - or by way of the suicide bomber, intentionally spreading death to an unwitting population.

The increasing availability and efficacy of combination antiretroviral therapy in the MSM communities of wealthy nations and the concomitant emergence of new categories of HIV identity afforded by viral biometrics seems to indicate that the threat of the ‘bugchaser’ and ‘gift-giver’ rhetoric has been suppressed by the intervention of drugs. However, discourses on drugs and gay sex are imbued with similar alarmism and monstrous characterisations, as demonstrated by the significant media and community attention around a more recent documentary exposé. The Vice documentary *Chemsex* was released to British cinemas on the 4th of December 2015, a few days after World AIDS Day. The documentary, made by straight male filmmakers William Fairman and Max Gogarty, depicts London’s gay male ‘party and play’ scene, drawing on interviews from current and former drug users, health professionals and community stakeholders. Described by the filmmakers as a “confessional show-and-tell about a community’s search for intimacy and belonging,”⁵ the takes viewers on an “unflinching journey into the dark underworld of modern, urban gay life” hidden in plain sight in London, where gay men use a range of illegal substances and engage in risky sex, facilitated by the rise of hook-up apps which have led to a spatial privatisation of gay sex away from nightclubs and into private homes and gay saunas. Not dissimilar to *The Gift* a decade earlier, an ominous soundtrack accompanies interviews from scene participants and experts. Notably, however, *Chemsex* exemplifies Vice Media’s ‘frank’ and unfiltered approach to documentary film, featuring explicit scenes of drug use and

⁴ Ibid., p.84.

⁵ William Fairman and Max Gogarty, 'Watch the Trailer for Our New Film, 'Chemsex'', *VICE.com*, 22 October 2015, https://www.vice.com/en_dk/article/watch-the-trailer-for-our-new-film-chemsex-422.

unprotected sex through a shockingly realist lens. Subjects describe being forcibly injected with methamphetamine against their will during sex parties and ‘breeding parties’ where participants can be ‘pozzed up’ with HIV. One HIV-positive subject discusses being a “HIV skeptic” and refusing medication; another is filmed in his apartment during a drug-induced psychosis. Importantly, the consumption of drugs and the consumption of sex are mutually constituted here: drug use is framed as at once being used to facilitate sexual pleasure whilst also channelling users towards (dangerous) sexual disinhibition. Further, the treatment of HIV through chemsex discourses situates the virus in constant reciprocation with drugs. Here, either the primary risk involved in the consumption of drugs is understood to be HIV, or drug use is articulated as a form of self-medication and escapism from the threat or actuality of HIV transmission. Clearly, the cultural discourses surrounding HIV/AIDS are increasingly congruous with cultural discourses surrounding drug use, and both are mediated through a lens which refracts the accessibility to pleasure and shame.

The eRotics of HIV

In the present chapter, I argue that the ‘post-AIDS’ chemoprophylactic era has witnessed a concretisation and reinforcement of the bonds between medicine and pleasure. Through this coalescence of corporeal practices and biomedical technologies, a decisive shift in the cultural meaning and valence of HIV and AIDS becomes apparent. Articulated through textual analyses of recent pornographic and/as documentary films, I elucidate that the increasing incorporation of chemical substances into regimes and discourses of sexuality and sexual pleasure demonstrates the emergence of what I term an eRotics of HIV.

My neologism ‘eRotics’ plays on the typographic misinterpretation of the symbol ‘R’ which is in widespread contemporary use in the medical profession as a short-hand for ‘prescription’ and as a symbol representing the pharmaceutical industry.⁶ The origins of the symbol seem to have been lost to history, yet the meaning of the symbol is a matter of broad consensus. It is abundantly clear that the ‘R’ component of

⁶ Emilee Bailey, 'Symbols: Historic and Current Uses', *International Journal of Pharmaceutical Compounding*, vol. 12, no. 6, 2008, p. 506.

the symbol stands for the Latin *recipe*, ‘to take’, however the upward stroke ligature through the tail of the ‘R’ engenders a range of theories from folk etymologists, mostly within the medical profession. John L. Thornton notes that the symbol was used at least as early as the fifteenth century to stand for *recipe*, demonstrating “the relationship which existed at the time between physician and apothecary.”⁷ Jeff Aronson, a clinical pharmacologist, posited in the *British Medical Journal* in 1999 that the symbol was “a corruption of a symbol that was once used by the ancient Egyptians to signify the utchat, the eye of Horus.”⁸ He goes on to claim that the recent misinterpretation of the symbol as ‘R’ plus ‘x’ to indicate an abbreviation “has led to the proliferation of numerous similar abbreviations, used as shorthand in case notes: Hx for history, Sx for symptoms ...”⁹ In May 1913, Elizabeth Robinson Scovil included an informative note referencing the *Journal of the American Medical Association* that

the upward stroke at the end of the R standing for recipe is believed to have originated in the astronomic sign for the planet Jupiter, which was formerly put at the head of prescriptions to symbolise a prayer to the deity for blessing on the remedy ordered.¹⁰

Writing in response, Thomas W. Bath, M.D. offered a personal anecdote as to his understanding of the ligature, which he argued was “a more nearly correct explanation, and certainly more plausible.”¹¹ Recounting a certain Dr. Louis Bauer of St. Louis under whom Bath was a medical student and whom was “one of the most scholarly men [Bath had] ever known,” it is argued that the origin of the ligature is in fact the Christian crucifix, as priests often acted as physicians in the “early medieval days,” and prescriptions would always begin with the sign of the cross and then the phrase “In the name of God, Amen” followed by the word *recipe*, over time shortened to the R symbol for brevity.¹² However, returning to the *Journal of the American*

⁷ John L. Thornton, 'A Fifteenth-Century Prescription', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1961, p. 421.

⁸ Jeff Aronson, 'X Marks the Spot', *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, vol. 318, no. 5 June, 1999, p. 1543.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Elisabeth Robinson Scovil, 'Notes from the Medical Press', *The American Journal of Nursing*, vol. 13, no. 8, 1913, p. 607.

¹¹ Thomas W. Bath, 'The Stroke across the R Heading a Prescription', *ibid.*, p. 294.

¹² Ibid.

Medical Association article referenced by Scovil, her misinterpretation is evident. The letter to the editor of the Journal to which she refers - taking the form of correspondence between Hugh McGuigan, M.D., and O.F. Long, professor of Latin at Northwestern University - enquires as to whether the ligature in the symbol aligns with literature of the time on script-writing, which “states that in ancient times it was the custom to preface a prescription with a pious invocation to Jupiter,” over time becoming abbreviated to the astronomical symbol for Jupiter (♃). Professor Long disagrees, noting that an ancient system of shorthand known as *Notae Tironianae* utilised such ligatures to abbreviate a large range of words, citing four Latin words which used the R symbol as an abbreviation (Respondere, Reverendo Domino, Rubrica, Reverendi). Long states in reference to *recipe* that

You will see here that the ligature is not used. This is precisely what we find to be the case in all of these abbreviations under the letter R, regardless of the meaning of the word. Sometimes the stroke is put across the tail of the R, and sometimes not. I do not believe that the facts afford any basis for the theory of an invocation to Jupiter.¹³

Thus, the professor of Latin at Northwestern University in 1913 - whose argument about the use of the ligature in ancient texts was either ignored or misinterpreted in subsequent retellings - provides a posthumous repudiation of Aronson’s 1999 postulation that contemporary abbreviations used by medical practitioners represent a misinterpretation of the origin of R. However, the origin myths of the symbol continue to invoke references to the gods, as Emilee Bailey states in an article on the use of symbols in the pharmaceutical sciences in the International Journal of Pharmaceutical Compounding in 2008 that “in the days of superstition, physicians would use the signs as a heading for their prescriptions to indicate a prayer to Jupiter, who they considered a deity,” citing E. Lehner’s 1950 *Symbols, Signs & Sygnets*.¹⁴

I outline these historical (mis)interpretations here as they perfectly illustrate the ambivalence of meaning and impossibility of truth when the origin of a written text has been ‘lost to history’. In the absence of direct proof of its etymology, meaning is imbibed into the symbol by its practitioners. In this sense, the ambiguity of the origin of

¹³ Long in H. McGuigan, 'Correspondence', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, vol. 61, no. 8, 1913, p. 616.

¹⁴ Bailey, p. 506.

the $\mathbb{R}$ symbol corresponds with Derrida's meditation on the *pharmakon*, which, of no coincidence, is the root word from which the contemporary English words 'pharmaceutical' and 'pharmacy' are derived. In his detailed analysis of Plato's dialogues, Derrida grapples with Plato's use of the term *pharmakon*, a word with multiple meanings in Ancient Greek and which Plato playfully deploys in various contexts and which have been translated variably throughout the texts as 'remedy,' 'recipe,' 'poison,' 'drug,' 'philter,' 'charm,' 'medicine,' 'substance,' 'spell,' 'artificial colour,' 'ink,' and 'paint.' Derrida recalls Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates meets the eponymous Phaedrus outside of Athens, and compares the written texts that Phaedrus has presented to a drug:

This *pharmakon*, this 'medicine,' this philter, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination, can be - alternately or simultaneously - beneficent of maleficent. The *pharmakon* would be a substance - that all that that word can connote in terms of matter with occult virtues, cryptic deaths refusing to submit their ambivalence to analysis, already paving the way for alchemy - if we didn't have eventually to come to recognise it as ant substance itself: that which resists any philosopheme, indefinitely exceeding its bounds as nonidentity, nonsubstance; granting philosophy by that very fact the inexhaustible adversity of what funds it and the infinite absence of what founds it.¹⁵

In Plato's ambivalence, readers and translators of *Phaedrus* must decide for themselves as to the exact meaning of *pharmakon* in a given passage, either by deciding the most appropriate translation based on the given context or by Plato's intention. However, Derrida notes, whereas in some instances Plato's intentionality is transparent, in others these links are not so clear, and argues that even Plato is unable to see the links, yet "the links go on working of themselves."¹⁶ Thus the *pharmakon* disavows truth and meaning, and "no absolute privilege allows us absolutely to master its textual system."¹⁷ In (mis)reading $\mathbb{R}$ as (Rx), then, the neologism of 'e $\mathbb{R}$ otics' similarly points to the multivalent and indeterminate meanings ascribed to drugs and to sexual pleasure. Further, in response to Plato's attempt to demonstrate the privileged relationship between speech and authenticity by disavowing the written word, e $\mathbb{R}$ otics constitutes a troubling intervention as its very form evades vocalisation, any attempts to render it into

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, London, Continuum, 2004, pp. 75-6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.96.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

speech resulting in a contorted and unintelligible sound as its primacy in meaning lies firmly within its visual, written rendering. As the etymology of *pharma-* neatly demonstrates, the meaning of a drug is always-already ambivalent: drugs can be medicine or poison, elixir or libation; drugs can be prescribed in order to cure or remedy or they can be taken for pleasure or stimulation. As a global War on Drugs rages on into its fourth decade with an aim to stamp out access to substances deemed illegal and used recreationally, research, activism and development continues into new substances marketed to cure or remedy all manner of ills, including HIV. Pleasure, similarly, holds ambivalent meanings: pleasure is alternately repudiated or recommended; sexual acts are conceived as life-giving, life-affirming, ecstatic or as risky conduits leading to infection and death. *eRotics* thus emphasises the ambivalent and ambiguous products of discourses around embodied erotic practices and (pharmaceutical/recreational) drugs, and the exoticisation at their confluence. As audiovisual melanges of mediated flesh and substance, the films analysed in this chapter are all underpinned by an *eRotics* of HIV, whereby sex and substances are coterminous and mutually constitutive. Further, these films point to a newly emergent eroticisation of (pharmaceutical/recreational) drugs, of the incorporation of the *pharmakon* as an act framed in the discourse of neoliberal responsibility and a self-induced disciplinary regime which can also, in fact, be understood as constituting an act of consumption and corporeal pleasure. Importantly, through their *eRotic* optic, these films demand an urgent reconsideration of the meaning of HIV in a sexual epoch mediated by biomedical technologies which at once enhance, protect, refute and sustain *eros* and *thanatos* in the body of the subject.

Chapter Outline

In the following section, I locate the films to which this chapter refers within the context of an ambivalent generic form. In addressing the intermediary space between pornography and documentary, I argue that pornography can be understood as a form of knowledge-pleasure, drawing on Linda Williams' assertion that pornography works on and through the body by visualising the body's "truth," and further that it can be understood as a form of *scientia sexualis*, a discursive text in a constant tension between reflecting and inciting practice. The films in this chapter oscillate between definitions of documentary and pornography: those classified as pornography reiterate themselves -

both in paratext as well as in aesthetics and formal cinematic conventions - as 'indexical,' as documentation of actually-lived sexual scenes; the films which are presented within the conventional frameworks of the documentary genre, on the other hand, are arguably pornographic in their endeavours to incite and arouse. These erotic films are thus categorically slippery and evade simple classification.

Following this, the chapter is broken into three sections dissecting the temporal, biopolitical and spatial elements of the corpus. At the level of time, I consider how presence and realness are emphasised in the gay bareback pornography films of the studio Treasure Island Media, and how these films reach toward a documentary realism by engaging aesthetic, formal and paratextual techniques which mimic documentary film. The climactic crescendo of these films emerges as the moment of (potential) transmission. At the level of the body, I argue that the introduction of antiretroviral therapy instigated a dense intertwining of sex and drugs. In this sense, all gay sex in the chemoprophylactic era can be thought of as 'chemsex' one way or another. This incorporation of the *pharmakon* problematises the articulations during the epidemic era that barebacking practices operate under the logic of serofraternity or 'breeding', as bareback sex is effectively decoupled from its signification as a practice associated with HIV transmission. In this sense, PrEP is not dissimilar to the contraceptive pill, which decoupled heterosexual sex from procreation. Finally, at the level of space, I demonstrate how the spaces of gay sexual life have been privatised. Similarly, the chemoprophylactic era marks the zenith of the cartographic violence and geocorpographic signification of antiretrovirals: *pharmakon* can be incorporated by those who don't 'need' it in order to prevent HIV transmission whilst still engaging in fluid exchange, whilst the same drugs are similarly not available to those who cannot pay but require the drugs to survive. Zones of immunity and exclusion are produced, producing a spatialised demarcation between the inside and the outside. The seropositive body of the Global South is hence excluded in a sacrificial ritual as a *pharmakos* in a process of purification in which rich countries aim towards 'Zero HIV'.

Slippery Corpus: Situating the genre

This chapter is primarily concerned with the relatively recent emergence of the presence of HIV within the narrative and materiality of gay pornographic

representation; that is, of a certain “speaking” of HIV.¹⁸ Whereas the previous chapters addressed the shifting representation of HIV/AIDS in terms of screen-mediated texts situated within genres of historical fiction, melodrama, “global event-cinema”, and episodic education-entertainment series, the locus of this chapter shifts to genre that is at once difficult to define and, within cultural criticism, difficult to approach. Richard Dyer employs a working definition of pornographic film as “any film that has as its aim sexual arousal in the spectator” and goes on to argue that the generic specificities of this trajectory constitute porn as a cinema of the body, “like weepies, thrillers and low comedy” which are all “realised in/through the body.”¹⁹ Williams argues that what isolates the “body genres” of pornography, horror and melodrama is bodily excess, both visually represented onscreen as well as in terms of sensorial mimicry in the bodies of the audience; films in these genres can thus be measured through the bodily effects they induce - orgasm, shudder, and sobbing.²⁰ Body genres are also differentiated by bodily fluids: semen in pornography (onscreen and of the viewer), blood in horror (onscreen), tears in melodrama (onscreen and of the viewer). Often pitted in comparison with their counterparts from “higher” cinematic forms from which a bodily effect is not induced - in the case of porn, its counterpart is taken to be erotica - narrative is either taken to be ancillary to the text as a whole, or in the case of porn, absent or at least completely irrelevant. Similarly, porn’s appeal to the “involuntary” arousal of the spectator by way of representing the mechanistic, involuntary “truth” of bodily pleasure through the cinematic “frenzy of the visible”²¹ produces the justification of ignoring the aesthetics of porn. As Sobchack reminds us, cinematic texts that appeal to carnal responses “have been regarded as too crude to invite extensive elaboration beyond aligning them ... with more ‘kinetic’ forms of amusement such as theme park rides.”²² Porn, however, as the most visually-determined form of “knowledge-pleasure of sexuality,” is of course structured by a narrative and articulated through specific and variable visual

¹⁸ Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989, p. 2.

¹⁹ Richard Dyer, 'Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms', *Jump Cut*, vol. 30, 1985, p. 27.

²⁰ Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 4, 1991, p. 9.

²¹ Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*.

²² Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004, p. 37.

aesthetics.²³ Dyer argues that gay pornography “is a narrative sexuality, a construction of male sexuality as the desire to achieve the goal of a visual climax,” and in this sense the inherent narrativity of the gay porn film, with its linearity toward what Dyer terms “coming-to-visual-climax” negates the suggestion that porn’s carnal appeal renders its narrativity to be irrelevant.²⁴ This assertion then leads on to a reassessment of the role of aesthetics in porn: as a genre in which ‘narrative’ is inherent by way of the visually-overdetermined representation of bodies engaging in sexual practices, porn can be understood as a genre in which invariably similar narratives are consistently repeated. Aside from the spectator’s preferences for certain acts, or certain bodies, porn texts are distinguished from each other by the aesthetics of formal conventions.

Whilst there has been a considerable effort within academia to address pornography,²⁵ a curious tendency too often arises of avoiding or ignoring pornographic film as a site for formal, aesthetic and cinematographic critique. As the film and television studies scholar Karen Boyle notes in her meditation on Linda Williams’s 2004 edited collection *Porn Studies*, the two main academic and activist approaches to pornography are grounded in either an anti-pornography or an anti-censorship stance, yet “both positions simultaneously recognise pornography as the ob/scene: that which is kept off the stage of mainstream culture.”²⁶ This invisibility - both from the mainstream visual sphere and from academic film studies critique - contrasts with the heightened moral panic emerging from the late-1990s of the ‘pornification’ of popular culture, or what Linda Williams refers to as the “on/scene.”²⁷ This contradictory invisibility of porn as a site worthy of cultural analysis constitutes a distancing of one form of screen-mediated visual text from the broader realm of screen studies.

²³ Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*, p. 3.

²⁴ Dyer, p. 28.

²⁵ See Linda Williams’ article “Pornography, Porno, Porn: Thoughts on a Weedy Field” in the inaugural edition of the *Porn Studies* journal (2013) explores the terminology presently used across the field and criticises the use of the term “porn” for aligning too closely with the industry and not providing critical distance. Williams suggests that “when scholars of pornography adopt the slang of an industry for the name of their object of study, it is a little like film or cinema studies calling itself ‘movie studies’ or ‘flick studies’” (p.34).

²⁶ Karen Boyle, ‘The Boundaries of Porn Studies: On Linda Williams’ *Porn Studies*’, *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, vol. 4, no. 01, 2006, p. 9.

²⁷ Linda Williams, ‘Porn Studies: Proliferating Pornographies On/Scene: An Introduction’, *Porn Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2004.

In this chapter, I approach a genre of films which oscillate between definitions as pornography and as documentary, that are overwhelmingly defined by HIV and drugs, yet which rarely acknowledges this proximity in explicit terms. In the context of Williams' articulation of pornography as being structured by the "principle of maximum visibility," the absence of the very thing that defines the practices being represented in the genre produces its own very peculiar visual impossibility.²⁸ Whilst Tim Dean argues in *Unlimited Intimacy* that "the subculture that it anatomises are not principally about AIDS,"²⁹ it is impossible to dissociate barebacking, or indeed its pornographic representation, from the spectre of the AIDS epidemic. Dean himself notes that the AIDS epidemic and the attendant shifts in gay male sexual practice have significantly interrupted the cultural legibility of condomless gay male sex, to the extent that "unprotected anal sex between men has become something different that it once was."³⁰ For Dean, who is mostly interested in the homosociality of bareback - that is, a conceptualisation of "the barebacker" as a social actor within a subcultural scene defined by the practice - the meaning of condomless sex has been forever impacted by the AIDS crisis and the subsequent gay social contract of broad adoption of safer sex practices, and the attendant labelling of practices which contravene safe sex as "deviant". Within screen-mediated representation of condomless sex, Dean notes that the shift has been registered through the way that condomless porn has been marketed, distinguishing between porn marketed as 'pre-condom' from the 1970s and 1980s and porn produced after the epidemic that is marketed as "bareback."³¹ Similarly, Mowlabowcus *et al* note that the normalisation of condom use across the gay porn industry in the United States from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s precluded the representation of condomless anal sex in gay porn films during this time, and by the time that anxieties about the protection of companies' performers and reputations had dissipated, "the condom code had become an entrenched part of commercial gay male pornography."³² They chart a clear shift in the new millennium of the representation of condomless gay anal sex from the margins of gay male culture to being legitimised and

²⁸ Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*, p. 48.

²⁹ Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.5.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Sharif Mowlabocus, Justin Harbottle, and Charlie Witzel, 'Porn Laid Bare: Gay Men, Pornography and Bareback Sex', *Sexualities*, vol. 16, no. 5-6, 2013, p. 524.

normalised by larger conventional gay porn studios. The normalisation of condomless sex scenes in pornographic films can similarly be charted in terms of legislation. In 2012, 57% of residents of Los Angeles County voted in support of Measure B, the *County of Los Angeles Safer Sex in the Adult Film Industry Act*, which requires the use of condoms in all scenes of vaginal and anal penetration by a penis in pornographic productions filmed within the County. The outcome of the ordinance was an exodus of adult entertainment producers from Los Angeles County, with a 90% drop in the number of permit applications for pornographic film shoots submitted to FilmL.A.³³ However, a similar legislative effort which would have mandated condom use in pornography across the entire state of California - Proposition 60 - was defeated at the polls in November 2016. The measure, which was championed by Michael Weinstein, the president of the AIDS Healthcare Foundation, would have enabled any Californian resident to file a lawsuit against pornographic filmmakers, financiers and distributors in violation of the condom requirement. Further, the legislation would have installed Weinstein as an employee of the State, as the 'state porn czar' removable only with a 2/3 vote of legislators, and with taxpayer funding for legal fees and compliance validation.³⁴ Weinstein's AIDS Healthcare Foundation was the sole financial backer of Proposition 60, providing funding of \$4.9m. Whereas Dean emphasises that the corporeal, social and legal risks taken by members of the "bareback subculture" should be understood not simply in terms of proximity to a Freudian death drive but rather constitute emergent and innovative forms of queer kinship and "raises questions that complicate how we distinguish life-giving activities from those that engender death,"³⁵ I argue that recent developments both in the screen-mediation of condomless sex and in the broader cultural articulation of 'barebacking' have given rise to the potential end of 'barebacking' as a practice centred around a particular subcultural affiliation. Both of these shifts are concomitant to the incorporation of the *pharmakon* as a model of

³³ Richard Verrier, 'Porn Production Plummets in Los Angeles', *Los Angeles Times*, 6 August 2014, section On Location, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/cotown/la-et-ct-onlocation-la-porn-industry-20140806-story.html>.

³⁴ Chanel Preston and Jay Gladstein, 'Prop. 60 Isn't Needed to Protect Porn Actors', *The Sacramento Bee*, 12 October 2016, section Soapbox, <http://www.sacbee.com/opinion/op-ed/soapbox/article107800017.html>.

³⁵ Dean, p. 6.

‘informed matter’ which destabilises both the meaning of HIV and the meaning of condomless sex.³⁶

In this chapter I posit that bareback’s potential for engendering such meaning is rapidly dissipating through contemporary shifts in gay male sexual practice engendered by developments in biomedical technologies. However it is necessary to explicate here why bareback porn is of interest in this thesis, and why this chapter in particular addresses ‘documentary’ film despite the aims of this thesis being squarely located within the realms of cultural representation through fictionalised screen mediation. Firstly, as Linda Williams has argued, hardcore pornography operates on a principle of “maximum visibility,”³⁷ as a visually overdetermined “cinema of the body” that aims to produce corporeal effects in the viewer, it is compounded by its originary purpose of visualising pleasure and the impossibility of visualising female pleasure by any measure of involuntary mechanistic cinematic truth, and thus it becomes a “frenzy of the visible” in which the male ejaculation serves as the substitute and as the definitive, incontrovertible ‘proof’ of pleasure.³⁸ Secondly, as Tim Dean notes, bareback porn is met with a similarly compounding problem of the mechanics of visually representing its ‘truth’: as the filmic representation of a practice which is centred on the transmission of fluids from one body into another during the course of penetrative anal sex, the genre is defined by the problematics of visualising what the camera cannot see, giving rise to a range of ‘fluid’ practices and conventions within the genre which I will outline further in the next section. These practices, which endeavour to make visible the “utterances” of mechanistic corporeal truth of pleasure as crystallised by the spectularity of the male ejaculation, render the effect of maximum visibility of ejaculation to be preeminent within the genre. In turn, this casts bareback porn as an exemplar of the “frenzy of the visible,” the representation of ‘unmediated’ mechanical truth of phallic pleasure, and thus a particularly captivating pornographic optic. Finally, if we are to follow the Foucauldian approach that conceptualises porn as the visual form of “knowledge-pleasure” *par excellence*, and as an “implantation of perversions” that discursively produces power relations of bodily pleasure and constitutes an “instrument-

³⁶ Marsha Rosengarten, *HIV interventions: Biomedicine and the Traffic between Information and Flesh*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2009.

³⁷ Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*, p. 48.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.50.

effect” which isolates, intensifies and consolidates “peripheral sexualities” into rigid cultural forms,³⁹ then it follows that the “proliferation” of bareback pornography in the endemic era engenders cultural shifts in gay male sexual practice. However, before accounting for the genre’s shifts from a representation of subcultural practice morally regulated by its peripherality to a truly post-AIDS dispersal and the temporal, spatial and biopolitical modalities of its existence, it is prescient to account for the production company that is targeted by many, both within academia and mainstream journalism, as both the exemplar of the specific aesthetics and formal conventions of the genre and the instigator of the break in the epidemic-era social contract of mandating condoms in gay pornography.

Treasure Island Media

Founded in 1998 by Paul Morris, Treasure Island Media is a San Francisco based gay porn company that can claim the nefarious honour of spearheading the representation of bareback sex and explicit eroticisation of semen exchange onscreen. No stranger to controversy, Paul Morris and his company revel in the “outlaw” status ascribed to them by the mainstream gay porn industry, safer sex campaigners, AIDS organisations and the wider mainstream gay community. Treasure Island Media’s pariah status is evidenced by widespread sanctions from the industry and the community, with other porn companies refusing to allow their actors to appear in Treasure Island Media films and gay sex conventions barring the company from attending events.⁴⁰ However, these sanctions only serve to reify the company in the eyes of their many fans, and the company has a cult-like following, with an active online community and a fraternal subcultural kinship group.

Many followers of the company demonstrate their commitment by having the logo - a skull and crossed swords - tattooed on their bodies, some with the words ‘PROPERTY OF PAUL MORRIS’; a page on the company’s blog calls for fans to ‘JOIN THE CULT’, provides suggested endorsed tattoo flash designs of the logo, and

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Pantheon Books, 1978, Vol. 1: An Introduction, p. 48.

⁴⁰ Byron Lee, 'It's a Question of Breeding: Visualizing Queer Masculinity in Bareback Pornography', *Sexualities*, vol. 17, no. 1-2, 2014, p. 102.

offers to pay for the cost of the tattoo.⁴¹ This very literal inscription of fraternal affiliation in the flesh of performers and acolytes (and in the case of Treasure Island Media the delineation between the two is intentionally blurred) is one of many forms of subcultural symbolism that work to make visible what the newer and more effective forms of HAART have made invisible.

Where epidemic time was mediated by a visual-corporeal regime in which AIDS and PWA were highly visible, the endemic time of HIV as a manageable chronic condition is visually defined by its deficit. The visibility of AIDS in epidemic time also points to its potency, with the effects of bodily wasting and the inscription of Kaposi's Sarcoma emanating as powerful visual cues of affliction. Combination antiretroviral therapy began to render HIV invisible on the surface, predicating what Kane Race terms an "undetectable crisis" whereby HIV reverts from being a very public crisis determined by visual-corporeal signs of AIDS into a crisis of private responsibility determined by the treatment goal of an 'undetectable' viral load.⁴² The tattoo, as permanent inscription on the body of a coded visual sign, becomes a way of publicly demonstrating membership of a HIV community, they "textualise the body by rendering the surface of the skin communicative about the interior (seropositive) status of the blood, tissues and organs."⁴³ The resonance of these symbols is important.

Treasure Island Media's logo, a skull and crossed swords, offers a multitude of readings. The skull and crossed swords symbol is immediately recognisable as a pirate symbol; the particular version of the symbol adopted by Treasure Island Media is that of Captain John "Calico Jack" Rackham, an English pirate active in the Caribbean in the early 18th century, with the traditional bones underneath the skull replaced with crossed swords. Coterminous with the studio's name, which is a reference to both the fictitious island in the eponymous children's adventure novel by Robert Louis Stephenson and the physical artificial island in San Francisco Bay that was constructed for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition, the skull and crossed swords harkens to representation of the San Francisco-based studio's work and ethos (and barebacking and

⁴¹ TIM, *Morris' Marked Men: As Legendary as the Man Himself*, <http://www.treasureislandblog.com/news/timtalk/morrismarkedmen/>, 2013, (accessed 26 November).

⁴² Kane Race, *Pleasure Consuming Medicine: The Queer Politics of Drugs*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2009, p. 111.

⁴³ Dan Brouwer, 'The Precarious Visibility Politics of Self-Stigmatization: The Case of HIV/AIDS Tattoos', *Text and Performance Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1998, p. 114.

barebackers more broadly) as occupying an outlaw position. The contemporary cultural lexicography of the skull and crossbones draws from accounts of its use by buccaneers and pirates in the eighteenth century, who in turn drew from imagery of the *Danse Macabre*, the late-medieval allegory on the universality of death; it was simplified into the skull and crossbones symbol when used as a *memento mori* on tombstones. In vexillological terms, the skull and crossbones flag functioned as a means of “outing” oneself as a member of the criminal category; it was flown on approach to a target victim to provide the opportunity for surrender without a fight.⁴⁴ Thus the adoption of the pirate image aligns with the cultural articulation of erotic and exotic “outlaw” practices as per the covenant within gay sexual culture and within pornography in particular surrounding the representation of ‘safe sex’; that is, anal sex with condoms. An additional layer of meaning is ascribed to the symbol in the context of the type of sex acts portrayed in Treasure Island Media films and the representations of ‘breeding culture’. In barebacking parlance, ‘breeding’ is one of many terms used to denote ejaculating inside an anus, without a condom. As Tim Dean notes, bareback rhetoric is awash with metaphors of reproduction: “in breeding a virus, these men are propagating also a way of life, a sexual culture with its own institutions, codes of communication, ethical norms, representational practices, and kinship arrangements.”⁴⁵ Through the second reading of the symbolism of the skull and crossed swords and its precedent, the skull and crossbones, we can elucidate Treasure Island Media’s coded representation of the valence of the material substance at the heart of bareback sexual practices. The American Pharmaceutical Association resolved in 1853 that “all packages or bottles [of poisonous substances] shall be distinctly labeled with the word ‘Poison’ or a death’s head symbol, conspicuously printed” the symbol subsequently entered popular cultural visual language to denote toxicity.⁴⁶ Where the skull and crossed swords symbol denotes affiliation to the cult of Treasure Island Media, an alternative flesh inscription can be found in the form of the biohazard symbol. Brouwer notes that as early as 1994, the biohazard symbol has been used as a tattoo by seropositives to communicate their HIV status. Brouwer recalls the August/September 1994 issue of *POZ* magazine which

⁴⁴ Peter T Leeson, 'Pirational Choice: The Economics of Infamous Pirate Practices', *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, vol. 76, no. 3, 2010, p. 501.

⁴⁵ Tim Dean, 'Breeding Culture: Barebacking, Bugchasing, Giftgiving', *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 49, no. 1/2, 2008, p. 86.

⁴⁶ George B Griffenhagen and Mary Bogard, *History of Drug Containers and their Labels*, Madison, American Institute of the History of Pharmacy, 1999, p. 92.

featured an image of a man with the biohazard tattoo on his shoulder, in a series of images of HIV body art.⁴⁷ The biohazard symbol has become iconographic shorthand for bareback practices, vague enough to evade recognition outside of subcultural spheres with proximity to gay visual culture. The two coded registers of the Treasure Island Media logo thus reflects their self-proclaimed status as an “outlaw” group engaging in “illegal” activities, and their embrace of the reinscriptive symbolism of the “toxicity” of HIV-positive semen. It is through the double-meanings in which Treasure Island Media reveal that the pertinence of Derrida’s *pharmakon* becomes visible, whereby the “gift” of the virus occupies both the place of remedy and poison.

Despite (or perhaps, owing to) the broad demonisation of the company within the mainstream gay press and porn industry, founder Paul Morris and the films of the company have also attracted the attention of queer academia.⁴⁸ In part, this is due to the significant aesthetic, formal and thematic divergences of Treasure Island Media films from the baseline of the gay porn industry, and in part this is due to Morris’ articulation of a transgressive queer politic. In a paper entitled ‘No Limits: Necessary Danger in Male Porn’, presented at the World Pornography Conference in Los Angeles in 1998, Morris articulates his position that

it’s a job of porn to reflect the experience and the character of the people who watch it ... the representation not only of the truth but also of the complexity of the truth - the tangled and individual realities of practice and identity - is a responsibility of porn, the sexually indexical documentary genre.⁴⁹

Envisioning himself and his work as ethnographic documentary realism, it is not merely the “controversial” practices and subjectivities that Morris portrays that constitute the crux of his auteurism, but a consistent attempt to represent the authenticity of a sexuality that is unmediated, either by latex or by the sexual discourses that emerged as a result of AIDS.

⁴⁷ Brouwer, p. 114.

⁴⁸ Following Tim Dean’s address of Treasure Island Media in *Unlimited Intimacy*, queer scholars have recently turned to the films of the company as a case study in bareback pornography. See Garcia (2013), Lee (2014), McNamara (2013).

⁴⁹ Paul Morris, *No Limits: Necessary Danger in Male Porn*, in World Pornography Conference, edited, Universal City, CA, 1998.

In a recent interview with porn studies academic Susanna Paasonen in the journal *GLQ*, Morris points to the dual discursive threads which I go on to read into Treasure Island Media's films. For Morris, "[Treasure Island Media] is two things, basically. We're developing a living archive of real male sexual experience. And we're a laboratory that performs experiments that men involved in our community propose. You could say that we're a genetic laboratory exploring the vital sexual symbiosis of human and viral DNA."⁵⁰ What is interesting here is consistent divergence of Morris' work from the type of pornographic films that became dominant in the late 1970s and through to the 1980s and 1990s. These films, which I shall refer to as "conventional" gay porn and which Morris refers to as "mainstream" gay porn, construct a teleological narrative through a (generally poorly acted) storyline that flanks the sex scenes, often in clumsy, campy, hilarious fashion. These non-pornographic preludes do the work of situating the forthcoming pornographic scenes within a specific "phantasmic landmark" in order to construct a fantasy for the viewer, generally drawing on clichéd tropes of erotically-charged situations.⁵¹ In the case of male-male pornography, Cante and Restive argue that these settings produce images of public space which are at once necessary and unavoidable in all-male pornography. They suggest that gay pornographic spaces are inherently public spaces, whether they be fantasies constructed on the basis of obvious public spaces such as the gym locker room, the prison or the office, or the interface of the public within the private, as is the case with porn scenarios involving characters attending a private home to perform work by way of delivery or repair. They go on to articulate that even within a private space, such as a home, the representation of male-male sex, inherently non-normative, situates this act in relation to a public and "constitutes a key aesthetic dimension of the history of all-male moving image pornography."⁵² Yet what we see in both the rhetoric of Paul Morris and in the films this his studio produces are consistent attempts to portray the documentation of "real" sex, unmediated by "phantasmic landmarks", staged dialogue or the erotic potential of everyday life situations. Morris asserts that what he is presenting is an "archive" of unmediated sexual practice, documentation of the real sexual practices of

⁵⁰ Paul Morris and Susanna Paasonen, 'Risk and Utopia: A Dialogue on Pornography', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2014, p. 217.

⁵¹ Rich Cante and Angelo Restivo, 'The Cultural-Aesthetic Specificities of All-Male Moving-Image Pornography', in Linda Williams (ed.), *Porn Studies*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2004, p. 161.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.142.

gay male communities in the 'post-AIDS' era. Further, he presents his work through the frame of scientific experimentation, the combination and coexistence of "human and viral DNA." As we can see through the use of tattoos as visual markers of serostatus, bodies are written on the flesh; what we witness through the specific visual erotic strategies in Treasure Island Media's work is that they are also written in the flesh. What this amounts to is the production of viral fraternity through the practice of viral corpography. Viral inscription of ink in flesh by way of skull and crossbones and biohazard symbols produce Treasure Island Media's "marked men" as members of an alternative kinship structure, yet the crux of the cinematic power in Treasure Island Media's "indexical documentary genre" is to be found in its approach to the very material substance that gives rise to such categories in the first place. Further, Treasure Island Media's invocation of documentary realism provides two readings of temporality that situate the oeuvre in relation to the temporal schism of the Protease Moment: a consistent attempt to portray a sense of 'unmediated' reality that utilises documentary conventions of "real time", and a revival of the representation of sexual cultures and sexual practices in gay male communities in the pre-AIDS era which can be read as a form of pre-AIDS nostalgia.

Time

Speaking the Real: Documentary porn

In *Unlimited Intimacy*, Tim Dean discusses the first *What I Can't See*⁵³ film (Treasure Island Media, 1999) in terms of visibility, noting that "what the audience sees is precisely someone not seeing; the condition of not being able to see what getting inside your body via sexual means is transformed into a spectacle that can be witnessed." He goes on to suggest that at the heart of the bareback porn genre is a "persistent effort to picture what remains invisible - whether it be the virus, ejaculation inside the body, or the moment of infection."⁵⁴ 12 years later, the second scene of the Treasure Island Media film *In the Flesh* opens with an email ostensibly sent to Treasure Island Media's European branch director Liam Cole from a TIM fan. It reads:

⁵³ In this series, the receptive bottom of each scene is blindfolded.

⁵⁴ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, p. 113.

From: [Redacted]
To: "Liam" <liam@treasureislandmedia.com>
Sent: Saturday, July 2, 2011 11:41:16 AM
Subject: You made me a bareback cumdump

Liam, you're a genius at getting into the mind of a bareback bottom like me. I've watched your videos for years - fantasising about letting tops bareback me. I watched those hot bareback bottoms taking loads and imagined myself offering my raw neg hole up for everyone to breed.

I started to bareback with "neg" tops and I was hooked. Feeling them cum in me just made me want more. I kept finding more "neg" tops and sometimes I'd get 2-3 loads in a day and then jerk off watching your vids, imagining it was hot toxic HIV cum in my ass.

One time I was high and I couldn't get hard to fuck, so I let my poz pig friend fuck me - I was acting out things I had seen in your videos and I LOVED it! I started to get scared about how far I had taken this. I asked him to pull out but it was too late - my hungry hole had already milked all of his seed into me - he didn't let on that he had been shooting his gift into my thankful hole. When he told me he had cum, the shock and fear made me clench immediately on his cock. I'd crossed a line and there was no going back.

I regretted it a little at first, but then I kept watching your vids. I wanted the life of the bottoms I was seeing. You were in my mind showing me exactly what I wanted.

Later than morning, still out of my mind and watching your vids, I found a poz top online took his load, this time begging for it. It felt so hot to finally feel comfortable about openly asking for what I wanted. Now I had two poz loads in me and I was free - I was becoming a cum dump. I have no regrets. I'd love to be a blindfolded bottom in one of your vids - I'd want other young bareback bottoms to see me taking loads and wish it was them. Hopefully it would encourage them.

After three minutes of the email slowly scrolling up the screen through a red filter and with moaning in the background, the scene proper begins, with performer Aaron Lamb blindfolded and surrounded by 11 men, stripping him naked and obliging his fantasy, taking turns to penetrate and ejaculate inside him, as his eyes remain covered by the blindfold. I present this single scene as a prelude to this half of the chapter because it neatly and efficiently illustrates the key contentions that follow. Firstly, the persistent claim to the Real, the idiosyncratic formal and aesthetic convention that distinguishes the films of Treasure Island Media, is perfectly evidenced by the use of the fan email as an expository narrative device. Whilst relatively obtuse in comparison to the other formal, narrative and aesthetic conventions adopted by Treasure Island Media directors Paul Morris and Liam Cole - which will be analysed in greater detail in the close analysis of '#TeenageTruvadaWhore' and *Viral Loads* - this convention nonetheless illustrates the studio's commitment to working within the paradigmatic contexts of *cinéma vérité*. Secondly, the content of the email itself

demonstrates the key thematic concerns of the genre, concerns that further distinguish Treasure Island Media films both from mainstream gay porn studios who either do not represent condomless penetration or who have only recently started to eschew condoms in some of their films, and also from other bareback porn studios. This differentiation is made apparent through the eroticisation of HIV transmission, the eroticisation of seropositivity, and the element of fraternalism and subcultural affinity that Treasure Island Media both attracts and encourages. Whilst the provenance of the email itself is questionable despite its realistic presentation onscreen, and although the performer Aaron Lamb was most likely not its author and was in fact already HIV-positive, the email's role as prologue to the forthcoming scene is the single narrative element in the scene and produces the perception that Lamb is being seroconverted. It is here that we can see the ways in which Treasure Island Media deals in a sense of visual and narrative contemporaneity that goes beyond the representation of the corporeal truth of male sexual pleasure which Linda Williams argues is constituted by the "money shot";⁵⁵ in representing seroconversion, the filmmakers place the spectator at the very moment in which barebacking practice produces immutable and intransient corporeal meaning. As such, they are representing the 'real time' of bareback.

Julie Levin Russo argues that porn is characterised by its proximity to the real in four ways. Firstly, in terms of production, it "records an unsimulated, authentic sexual act;"⁵⁶ in terms of representation, "its images appear real due to their character and conventions;"⁵⁷ in terms of reception, "it acts directly on the viewer to produce real effects;"⁵⁸ and finally, in terms of its social context, "it is directly tied to real economic, political and/or cultural processes."⁵⁹ In the films of Treasure Island Media, the cinematic conventions adopted in order to represent the "realness" of bareback sex constitute its proximity to the documentary genre. In order to demonstrate how *Viral Loads* can be understood as a promulgation of "real time", I will now address the first

⁵⁵ Linda Williams, 'Fetishism and the Visual Pleasure of Hard Core: Marx, Freud, and the "Money Shot"', *Quarterly Review of Film & Video*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1989.

⁵⁶ Julie Levin Russo, 'The Real Thing': Reframing Queer Pornography for Virtual Spaces', in Katrien Jacobs, Marije Janssen, and Matteo Pasquinelli (eds), *C'Lick Me: A NetPorn Studies Reader*, Amsterdam, Institute of Network Cultures, 2007, p. 239.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.240.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

two of Russo's four characteristics through a close analysis of the central scene of the film, entitled 'Man Worship'. The majority of the scene follows a fairly standard chain of erotic visualisations for Paul Morris' work. The only credited performer in the scene, Blue Bailey, takes the role of the bottom in a "group breeding" scene, as twenty men of varying physical appearance take turns penetrating him and ejaculating. The conclusion of the scene is of key interest for its complication of the conventional visual economy of the "money shot" and its meditation of the erotic potential of the materiality of the virus, and these elements will be explored in more detail in the third section of this chapter, which addresses the biopolitical elements of the films. For now, however, I draw on the formal and aesthetic elements of the scene in order to account for the film's - and the genre's - 'unmediated' temporality by way of representing 'real time.'

An unsimulated, authentic act. Paul Morris situates his work within the genre of ethnographic documentary. In a 1998 paper delivered at the World Pornography Conference in Los Angeles, Morris compared his work to the video representation of skateboarders, "another American physically-based male subculture", arguing that bareback pornography and skateboarding documentary videos share intrinsic similarities (in terms of the representation of real danger, of subcultural affinity, of the "contextualisation of the creative and erotic act in everyday life"). Another key similarity for Morris is in the co-optation of these subcultural practices and aesthetics by larger mainstream corporations, which Morris sees as a "sanitising of the performance" as the "world of slick porn is a stylised and damaged representation of the drive men feel to experience physical communion."⁶⁰ Whilst porn as a genre more broadly is conceptualised as the representation of corporeal "truth", particularly in relation to the "involuntary" mechanical "truth" of male orgasm made visible through visual excess, for Treasure Island Media there is a consistent drive to authenticate the "realness" of the acts represented onscreen in order to maintain Morris' claim of representing the actual practices of a subculture, as a "living archive of real male sexual experience."⁶¹ Morris positions his work in terms of survival, as the documentation of the paradox of the subculture, as both "the subculture and the virus require the same processes for transmission ... how does one balance the struggle between the needs of the survival of the body and the needs within the body for the survival of traditions, truths and

⁶⁰ Morris.

⁶¹ Morris and Paasonen, p. 217.

practices?”⁶² In *Viral Loads* the relation to authenticity is seemingly compromised by the phantasmic positioning of the scene in terms of seroconversion. In the presser for the film on the Treasure Island Media website, transmission of the virus through subcultural sexual practice is inferred:

Mansex is a virus, one that uses men as its host. Some try to resist it. Others embrace it as the source of life and meaning. We live to breed the sex-virus, to pass it on to every random anonymous dude we meet and fuck. It's how we reproduce, man. We shoot viral loads every time. Our jizz ain't for making babies. Our sex spreads like wildfire...⁶³

Here, although transparently coded as “mansex”, we see how Treasure Island Media situate the scene in what some critics have described as a “metaphoric snuff film,”⁶⁴ as Morris’ pointed representation of the authentic moment of seroconversion is erotically intimated and apparently documented.

Hansen *et al* argue for the similitudes of pornography and ethnography. Each shares what they call a “discourse of domination;” where the dominant positional gaze in pornography is that of male subjectivity, in ethnographic film it is that of the coloniser.⁶⁵ However, as they contend, the production and reproduction of “realities” in ethnography and pornography occurs within a context of tension with the discourse of domination, as each “[disavows] its own complicity with a tradition it appears to contest.”⁶⁶ In *Viral Loads*, the inferred reading of the scene as “unsimulated” and “authentic” seroconversion - the scene’s contemporaneity in placing the spectator at the exact moment of viral transmission - is disavowed by the performer’s openly HIV-positive status.⁶⁷ Although this negates the scene’s authenticity as a record of seroconversion by way of a self-described “rite of passage,”⁶⁸ it is not the only element of the scene that aims to produce authentic “truth.” As I outline below, Morris and

⁶² Morris.

⁶³ TIM, *Viral Loads* (Press Kit), <http://www.treasureislandmedia.com/cart/VIRAL-LOADS.html>, 2014, (accessed 6 July).

⁶⁴ Tracy Clark-Flory, 'When HIV is a Turn-On', *Salon*, 16 April 2014, http://www.salon.com/2014/04/15/when_hiv_is_a_turn_on/, (accessed 6 July 2014).

⁶⁵ Christian Hansen, Catherine Needham, and Bill Nichols, 'Pornography, Ethnography, and the Discourses of Power', in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 209.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Clark-Flory.

⁶⁸ Treasure Island TIM, *Viral Loads* (Press Kit).

Treasure Island Media adopt a range of formal and aesthetic conventions of *cinéma vérité* in order to produce a sense of ‘real time’ through the apparent absence of mediation.

Images that appear real due to their character and conventions. One of the key elements that both defines the aesthetics of Treasure Island Media productions and distinguishes their work from that of mainstream conventional gay porn studios is the consistent and purposeful attempt of proximation to an authentic and unmediated representation of the activities of the subculture. In order to achieve the illusion of an unmediated and unadulterated account of bareback sex, Paul Morris and Liam Cole carefully adopt a number of formal and aesthetic conventions of ethnographic documentary film, reality television, and *cinéma vérité*.

In a heavy-handed critique of the movement, Thomas Waugh notes that *cinéma vérité* emerged out of a specific technological revolution - hand-held recording technologies - and resulted in a “sudden burst on both sides of the Atlantic” of a body of films “celebrating the new accessibility of ‘truth’ ... in the surface textures of audiovisual reality, in the immediacy of present time, and in the nuance of spontaneous behaviour.”⁶⁹ The movement of *cinéma vérité*, or *cinéma-direct* for the French, disavowed the authoritarian narration of the voiceover which “had hammered away at U.S. audiences for generations ... delivering its prepackaged interpretation of the ‘facts,’”⁷⁰ preferring instead to emphasise the visual as the harbinger of cinematic truth. Waugh notes that Richard Leacock, Robert Drew and their counterparts “rushed into the streets with their ‘caméra-stylos’ and discovered, as if for the first time, the vitality of ‘unmediated’ existence.”⁷¹ The claims of authentic “truth” of this “privileged grasp of reality” which “supplanted the old ‘subjective’ documentary modes of discourse” are echoed in Paul Morris’ persistent claims of objectively capturing the ‘unmediated’ sexual subculture of the barebacking community in San Francisco. However, just as Waugh argues that *cinéma vérité*’s talk of “honesty, intimacy and above all objectivity, as if these old brickbats of aesthetics had been invented along with the Nagra” accrue to a naiveté, Morris’ claims of the ethnographic documentary nature of his oeuvre are

⁶⁹ Thomas Waugh, 'Beyond Verité: Emile de Antonio and the New Documentary of the 70s', *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, no. 10/11, 1976, p. 234.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.235.

⁷¹ Ibid.

similarly impacted by the “serious liability” of their “persistent pretence of impartiality.”⁷² Jeanne Hall notes that post-1968 film scholars could not see *cinéma vérité* as anything but naive; by claiming objectivity and disavowing the cinematic apparatus, the movement, as Noël Carroll notes, “opened a can of worms and got eaten by them.”⁷³ However, parallels can be drawn between Treasure Island Media films and the *cinéma vérité* movement, and Paul Morris and Liam Cole adopt numerous aesthetic and formal tropes from the genre. The intended result of the adoption of these conventions is what Vivian Sobchack refers to as a “documentary consciousness” in the viewer, “a mode of embodied and ethical spectatorship that informs and transforms the space of the unreal into the space of the real.”⁷⁴

There are three key aesthetic and formal elements borrowed from *cinéma vérité* which produce a sense of ‘real time’ in *Viral Loads* and which are common throughout the Treasure Island Media oeuvre: the use of diegetic and non-diegetic sound, the use of subtitles, and the visibility of the apparatus. The first element is the way in which diegetic and non-diegetic sound is employed in this scene. Treasure Island Media films are notable within pornography more broadly for their apparent absence of overt non-diegetic sound, in particular eschewing the use of the bass-heavy scoring typically associated with pornography, or what Philip Hayward and Emil Stoichkov term “sex muzak”, which “complement[s] the intensity and rhythmic drive of the sex scenes” by way of “a predictable and functional style of instrumental scoring that avoids distraction from or complication of erotic spectacle.”⁷⁵ Morris’ background as a music studies scholar becomes apparent in the attention he places to the role of the sonic in his films. For Morris, the “sex muzak” of 1970s funk bass-lines and instrumental dance music that typifies mainstream porn “homogenises” the potential for the “physical specificity and truth of the pornographic trance” already inherent in the rhythmic trance of the profilmic action.⁷⁶ Morris argues that he uses sound in his films “not to awaken the

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Jeanne Hall, 'Realism as a Style in Cinema Verite: A Critical Analysis of "Primary"', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 30, no. 4, 1991, p. 27.

⁷⁴ Sobchack, p. 261.

⁷⁵ Philip Hayward and Emil Stoichkov, 'Zero Gravity: Science-Fiction Themed Porn Cinema and its Soundtracks 1990-2010', in Bruce Johnson (ed.), *Earogenous Zones: Sound, Sexuality and Cinema*, London, Equinox, 2010, p. 117.

⁷⁶ Morris and Paasonen, p. 235.

viewer from the masturbatory trance but to more fully engage him in it” and although the drive toward a documentary mode encourages the retainment of all profilmic sounds, in some cases this is “augmented” in order to “bring out the truth or meaning of a gesture, a moment, or a scene.”⁷⁷ He goes on to list “broken bones, animal cries, sound effects from horror movies, women’s screams, slowly rising oscillating tones” as sonic elements which have been utilised in films in addition to the manipulation of sounds through the use of reverb, echoes, sonic colour tinting and looping.⁷⁸ Despite this level of detail to the “sonic resonance” within Morris’ oeuvre, Treasure Island Media films are striking for their prioritisation of diegetic sounds. It is in this context that the non-diegetic sound in the beginning of the ‘Man Worship’ scene, which consists of a very stereotypical porn-film bass-line, registers as remarkably dissonant.

Given Morris’ background in sound studies, rejection of “the sort of music usually used in mainstream porn,”⁷⁹ careful attention to the minutiae of the soundscape of his films and the jarring dissonance of the short preview sequence from the rest of the film proper, it must be concluded that the presence of this music serves to situate the forthcoming scene as a carrier of specific meaning. This 25-second, 7-shot prelude, appearing before the titles of the actual scene, which is the second scene of the film, opens with a close shot of Bailey’s ass accommodating a hollow buttplug which in turn is accommodating a hand. Six other shots follow that provide a teaser of the teleology of the narrative, including the abject climax. We then see a title that temporally situates forthcoming scene in relation to the teaser - “one hour earlier” - followed by the scene title, ‘Man Worship’, transposed over jarring shots across a room full of naked men, and a single performer credit, “blue bailey”. For the length of this title sequence, a 1980s bass-line fills the auditory space, the use of which seems on the surface to dislocate this scene from both the rest of the film and from the rest of Morris’ work by associating it with mainstream gay porn. Yet the gag is revealed when the choppy, jarring shots revert suddenly to the standard hand-held digital video composition we are accustomed to seeing in Treasure Island Media films and just as suddenly the bass-line disappears. This quick jolt from mediated, clichéd porn convention to a documentary realist aesthetic is further emphasised by the auditory shock as the first diegetic sound we hear

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp.235-6.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.235.

in the scene is of laughter. The affect of this rapid transition immediately resituates the scene within the *cinéma vérité* documentary realist porn genre, particularly by use of the laughter. It portends to capture a sense of realness through diegetic voice, whilst also intimating the sociality of the scene.

In *Hard Core*, Linda Williams notes that most porn films were recorded without sound and then dubbed with disembodied sound in post-production, the effect of which “is to detract from the spatial realism of synchronous sound.”⁸⁰ Williams goes on to analogise between hard-core porn films and movie musicals, both of which highlight that “visual and aural closeness are not commensurate.”⁸¹ Through the recording and utilisation of synchronous, diegetic sound from the profilmic space and the absence of an instrumental score, Morris and Treasure Island Media are enhancing the sense of sonic “closeness” between the scene and the viewer, minimising the perception of mediation. Yet the particular type of diegetic sound I am exploring here is also of interest: its content and form. Whilst it is not unusual for synchronous, diegetic sounds of certain registers to be emphasised within porn films - think, for example, of the “sounds of pleasure” whose allure “resides at least partly in the fact that they come from inside the body and are often not articulate signs”⁸² - it is not a moan, grunt or exhalation, all sounds which (have the potential to) offer a sign of authenticity to the cinematic “truth” of corporeal pleasure within the porn film. Rather, the diegetic sound that crashes the viewer back into the pornotopic space of Treasure Island is of laughter. In *Voice and Nothing More*, Mladen Dolar extrapolates the paradox of laughter: on the one hand, it is “a physiological reaction which seems close to coughing and hiccups, or even more animal-like sounds” yet on the other it is an inherently “cultural trait of which only humankind is capable,” as such it seems to “exceed language in both directions at the same time, as both presymbolic and beyond symbolic; it is not merely a precultural voice seized by the structure, but at the same time a highly cultural product which looks like a regression to animality.”⁸³ Much like the involuntary moans that spurt forth from within the body during orgasmic climax - the sonic counterpart to the visual register of the mechanical truth of corporeal pleasure - laughter can be the

⁸⁰ Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*, p. 123.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.124.

⁸² Ibid., p.126.

⁸³ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2006, p. 29.

emanation of the uncontrollable spasm induced not through bodily reflex but through cultural reflex. The presence of laughter at the beginning of the ‘Man Worship’ scene is thus pertinent because it situates the scene within the context of the social, and emphasises the ‘authenticity’ of the fraternal space. In this sense, it solidifies the contemporaneity of the scene that follows and validates the ‘realness’ that the scene aims to represent.

The second aesthetic and formal element of documentary cinema which is adopted in *Viral Loads* seeks to authorise and visualise the diegetic utterances and narrative ‘facts’ of the scene. A striking feature of Treasure Island Media’s *oeuvre* which testifies to the company’s attempt to position their films as a form of ethnography is the use of subtitles. As previously noted, bareback pornography has a defining problem induced by the intersection between the erotic appeal material substance and its logistical visualisation. If it is the absence of condoms (as a form of mediation) that differentiates bareback porn from non-bareback porn, then it follows that it is the transgression of the physiological purpose of the barrier, of preventing the exchange of fluids, that is central to the erotic phantasm. However, the very act that is emphasised within breeding culture - ejaculation inside another - suffers from a visual deficit, as materiality of the act and of the substance cannot be seen from the camera’s vantage point. Whilst this gives rise to a number of innovations in the visual economy of the “money shot,” innovations which Tim Dean describes as “compromise shots,”⁸⁴ upon which I will expand further, the use of subtitles constitutes one such method of overcoming the visual deficit.

Subtitles are used in Treasure Island Media films in three ways: to provide narrative testimony for happenings that are beyond the reach of visibility, such as an internal cumshot; to quantify for the viewer the extent of the receptive bottom’s consumption, presented as a ‘load count’ updated at each ejaculation; and to make clear the utterances and commentary emerging from performers and, at time, crew members. As I demonstrated at the beginning of this section, in Treasure Island Media films a sense of ‘real time’ is invoked through the use of these linguistic visualisations that attest to the authenticity of the obscured diegetic voice in addition to providing narrative placement, as is the case with the email preceding *In the Flesh*. Titles are also deployed

⁸⁴ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, p. 131.

in order to situate the narrative of each scene within a phantasmic space. Cante and Restivo note that gay male pornographic texts are always already situated in relation to a public, whether this is denoted explicitly through the use of “phantasmic landmarks,” narrative elements or characters that proclaim a specific fantasy, or simply by the very virtue of their status as non-normative acts within the heteropatriarchal paradigm.⁸⁵ The “phantasmic landmarks” in *Viral Loads* are put into place through the documentary conventions of labels and titles; the phantasmic structure is contextualised in the first scene by way of the scene titles, “ADULT BOOKSTORE BASEMENT FUCK”, and commences suddenly with the main star of the film, Blue Bailey, on his knees as another older man is standing and violently fucking his mouth. Bailey’s partner proceeds to penetrate him anally in a multitude of positions, leading to the scene’s climax as per the conventional progression of such scenes, as Bailey’s partner ejaculates inside him and continues to thrust as semen splatters the frame. We are then informed through interstitial titles that twenty minutes later, Blue “needed the taste of more cock before leaving the bookstore”, and the setting changes to the bookstore’s glory holes with Bailey again on his knees, fellating the anonymous, disembodied penises that protrude through cutouts in the wall. In the absence of a performative plot, subtitles are used to provide narrative context; this extends to the use of subtitles to account for what cannot be seen, where the viewer “sees subtitles rather than semen; testimony substitutes for visual evidence.”⁸⁶ In the present scene, which lacks the specialised quantitative tally count deployed in other titles such as *Dawson’s 20 Load Weekend*⁸⁷ and *Christian: 24 Cocks in 24 Hours*,⁸⁸ the subtitles provide the testimonial evidence of internal cumshots as well as keeping track of the number of times each performer has ejaculated; for example, the audience is alerted to “Steven’s second load,” “Logan’s third load.” (Fig. 4.1). Finally, subtitles are used in Treasure Island Media films to make legible the muffled utterances of the performers. Tim Dean suggests that the use of subtitles for this purpose serves two functions: it preserves the “colourful vernacular” of the performers, which at times appear to be “muttered spontaneously”, but more importantly Dean notes that Morris, who “understands the erotic appeal of an idiosyncratic verbal discourse accompanying sexually explicit images” utilises this

⁸⁵ Cante and Restivo, p. 161.

⁸⁶ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, p. 134.

⁸⁷ See *Filmography*.

⁸⁸ See *Filmography*.

formal convention in order to heighten the “documentary effect by retaining all the contingent noises.”⁸⁹



Fig.4.1: Subtitles to quantify and authenticate invisible corporeal “truths.”

The third and final element that demonstrates the adoption of the aesthetic and formal conventions of *cinéma vérité* in the work of Paul Morris and Treasure Island Media is the tension between acknowledgement and disavowal of the cinematic apparatus. Bill Nichols noted that, much like narrative film, the aesthetic and formal conventions of documentary film “have a history”, they respond to cultural and historical shifts to the extent that “the comfortably accepted realism of one generation seems like artifice to the next.”⁹⁰ Given the similitudes between the documentary and pornography genres charted above, it is worth emphasising that Treasure Island Media demonstrates how the aesthetics and formal conventions of pornography, too, are subject to historical shifts. Morris’ proximation his films within the realm of ethnographic documentary raises a number of interruptive points that recall prior debates surrounding modes of documentary address and the aesthetic and formal conventions that work to emphasise or hinder the genre’s proximity to the real. Three similarities between these debates will be teased out here in relation to *Viral Loads* in order to illustrate the perpetual tension between the acknowledgement and disavowal of the cinematic apparatus within Treasure Island Media films: Morris’ repeated insistence

⁸⁹ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, p. 133.

⁹⁰ Bill Nichols, 'The Voice of Documentary', *Film Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 3, 1983, p. 17.

that he is “capturing” rather than “producing” these scenes; the literal visibility of the cinematic apparatus in his works; and moments of direct address of the gaze of the performers with the camera. What is effected by these formal and aesthetic conventions is an attempt to situate Treasure Island Media films in terms of ‘unmediated’ documentary realism. However, as I shall illustrate, the criticisms charged by scholars and critics toward early proponents of *cinéma vérité* resonate with criticisms of the supposed authenticity and ‘realness’ of Treasure Island Media films and demonstrate the tension between disavowal and acknowledgement of the filmmaker’s inherent mediation of the scenes of ‘raw’ sexuality that constitute the films.

Firstly, metaphoric disavowal of the cinematic apparatus is made apparent by the way that Morris frames his work in terms of ethnographic documentary. In an interview with Vice Magazine, Morris stipulates that performers approach him with their fantasies and Morris endeavours to construct them: “we put them into situations they want to be put into. Everyone who’s in one of our pieces is doing exactly what they most want to be doing.”⁹¹ Similarly, Tim Dean notes that Morris’ claims of adopting the role of ethnographer and facilitator, rather than director or producer, are solidified in his framing of the origins of another Treasure Island Media film, *Breeding Mike O’Neill*,⁹² which is listed on the Treasure Island Media website with a synopsis claiming that Mike O’Neill actually offered to pay Paul Morris for the chance to appear in the film.⁹³ Yet this framing is not without tension, and a sense of anxiety on the part of Morris himself as to his level of distancing from the construction of the text. In a dialogue with porn studies scholar Sussana Paasonen in GLQ, Morris illustrates the tension between his positionality as ethnographer and pornographer perfectly through a subtle yet pointed distinction in the verb he uses to describe his work. He begins by saying “the sexual scenes I produce...” but then pauses to clarify that “‘capture’ would be a better word for it.”⁹⁴ In the context of his self-described role as ethnographer, this distinction is rather

⁹¹ Toby McCasker, ‘A Porn Director Stirred Up Controversy by Making a Movie Centered Around HIV’, *VICE.com*, 13 May 2014, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/director-paul-morris-believes-hiv-should-be-part-of-gay-porn.

⁹² See *Filmography*.

⁹³ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, pp. 119-120.

⁹⁴ Morris and Paasonen, p. 234.

telling. In relation to *Viral Loads*, the lines between documentation and instigation are as productively ambiguous as Blue Bailey's HIV status.⁹⁵

Secondly, the literal disavowal of the cinematic apparatus is paradoxically gestured by way of making the apparatus visible within the profilmic space. By ensuring that the viewer is, at times, able to catch glimpses of the cinematic apparatus within the scene - members of the film crew in the frame, accoutrements of film production such as boom mics, coaxial cables and lighting rigs, and occasionally the diegetic voice of the director or camera operator - Morris is attempting to disavow the artifice of his films and distance the viewer's gaze from that of the camera. Whilst on the one hand, these elements are interpreted as evidence of an "amateurish", unpolished production, in the context of Morris' claim as a documentary ethnographer, they point to a sense of reflexivity about the filmmaking process. Bill Nichols argues that a key aspect of more recent documentary modes is what he terms the "reflexive mode", which "gives emphasis to the encounter between filmmaker and viewer rather than filmmaker and subject."⁹⁶ The visible presence of the accoutrements of production in *Viral Loads* are thus not simply accidental oversights of the production and editing process, but pointed interruptions to the phantasmic "masturbatory trance" of the viewer.⁹⁷ By making these accoutrements visible, Morris is attempting to disavow the cinematic apparatus - that is, the elements of construction and production of the profilmic space - and in doing so, he is engaging with critiques of the objective observationality claimed by proponents of *cinéma vérité*.

Paradoxically, the visibility of the apparatus supports, rather than negates, the phantasmic pleasure of the viewer, by acknowledging the "suspect" qualities of claims towards "realist access to the world, and the ability to provide persuasive evidence, the

⁹⁵ Blue Bailey was already a well-known bareback porn performer prior to *Viral Loads*, and his serostatus was not ambiguous; in an interview on Treasure Island Media's website in 2013, Bailey discusses his seroconversion in "positive" terms, framing it as "what really got me to stop using [crystal methamphetamine] and get my life together." (Treasure Island Media 2013, n.p.). Yet it is noteworthy that Bailey's serostatus is absent from both the film text itself and the paratextual framing of the film on the Treasure Island Media website, in order to insinuate to the viewer that the scene in *Viral Loads* is documenting seroconversion. In an interview with *Salon* after the film was released, Bailey suggests that Treasure Island Media "may have left out [his] status on purpose to maybe hype it up" and believes that "[the producers] left [Bailey's serostatus] out to get people talking about it." (Clark-Flory 2014, n.p.).

⁹⁶ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 60.

⁹⁷ Morris and Paasonen, p. 235.

possibility of indisputable argument, the unbreakable bond between an indexical image and that which it represents.”⁹⁸ Thus by including moments of interruption of the fantasy-space of the scene through occasional yet regular glimpses of clothed film crew, cables and lighting equipment, Morris is calling attention to the cinematic apparatus and providing the viewer with “a sense of the text’s presence in his or her interpretative field” in order to disavow the perception of the constructedness of the scene.⁹⁹ These processes of dis/avowal of the cinematic apparatus are also evidenced in the editing of the scene. Earlier, I noted that the scene is preluded by a short 25-second sequence with jarring, choppy footage and a non-diegetic soundtrack; these elements, which are dissonant both with the presentation of the rest of the film and with Treasure Island Media’s aesthetic more broadly, explicitly draw attention to the cinematic apparatus, emphasising the use of post-production editing and acting as an interruption to the flow of the rest of the film from scene to scene, and thus emphasises this scene in particular as ‘special’. Monica Mitarcă notes that sound is employed in film to “connect the narrative with time”; thus, a porn film can be “re-signified” as an “art” film through the use of non-diegetic sound “to distance the viewer and create the illusion of fiction.”¹⁰⁰ In the ‘Man Worship’ scene of *Viral Loads*, the distance produced between the viewer and the profilmic space during this 25-second prelude, through contrast with the scene proper, both serves to emphasise the ‘realness’ of the following scene and emphasise its ‘real time’ temporality. The abrupt transition from the overtly unreal aesthetic of the prelude to the absolute realness of the following scene is manifest visually through the abrupt jump from the asynchronous choppy footage to the diegetic filmic temporality, and sonically through the synchronous laughter of one of the participants. For Mitarcă, the authenticity of porn is codified through diegetic sound, which invokes a direct connection between the viewer and the narrative, “certifying the film’s authenticity” and thus certifying “the non-simulated nature of the sexual act.”¹⁰¹ As such, this jump codes the scene’s proximity to a sense of real time by both emphasising its mediation, and its ‘unmediated’ temporality.

⁹⁸ Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*, p. 60.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.63.

¹⁰⁰ Monica Mitarcă, 'The Body as the Place of Identity in Fiction Film: Body Changes as a Way of Addressing Societal Fears', *Ekphrasis. Images, Cinema, Theory, Media*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2014, p. 95.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Thirdly, aesthetic and formal conventions of *cinéma vérité* can be evidenced by specific filmic moments that capture seemingly authentic interactions between the performers and the camera. One such example of these authentic interactions is the diegetic laughter in the auditory space at the beginning of the scene. Visually, these authentications of realness consist of momentary connections between the gaze of the performers and the gaze of the camera (and thus, the viewer). Yet the scarcity of these moments, and their pointed deployment at particular points in the narrative, demonstrate how Morris and Treasure Island Media oscillate between avowal and disavowal of the cinematic apparatus and the tension between the illusory ‘unmediated’ fantasy-space evoked by the cinematic apparatus’ invisibility, and the authentication and real-time temporality engendered by the apparatus’ acknowledgement. One such moment occurs at the end of the ‘Man Worship’ scene. Blue Bailey has been anally penetrated by 20 men over the course of 30-minutes of filmic time, with each ejaculating inside him, and some, as the subtitles authenticate, ejaculating more than once. Whilst Linda Williams’ original conceptualisation of the “money shot” illustrates that the male ejaculation, as a visible spectacle that authenticates the corporeal pleasure of the interaction, generally operates within heterosexual hardcore porn as the climax of the scene, the “frenzy of the visible” we witness in the ‘Man Worship’ scene of *Viral Loads* consists of a succession of “money shots.”¹⁰²



Fig. 4.2: Bailey’s gaze

¹⁰² Williams, ‘Fetishism and the Visual Pleasure of Hard Core: Marx, Freud, and the “Money Shot”’.

The scene's narrative climax consists of the most overt reference to "breeding culture" and seroconversion yet seen in Treasure Island Media's extensive oeuvre of bareback porn, as a jar of fluid, labelled "POZ LOADS," is ritualistically poured into Blue Bailey's rectum. I will elaborate on the significance of this in the forthcoming sections, however in relation to 'authentic' momentary filmic glimpses, it is noteworthy that this is the only moment since the beginning of the scene in which a performer's gaze connects with the camera, as Blue Bailey looks directly into the lens (Fig. 4.2). In terms of the dis/avowal of the cinematic apparatus, this direct gaze is poignant in that, despite multiple hand-held cameras and numerous close shots of performers' faces, distance is maintained through the lack of the direct gaze of the subjects with the exception of this shot. In doing so, the viewer is made acutely aware of the construction of the scene whilst at the same time is intimately connected with Bailey at the moment of (representational) seroconversion. The linguistic signifier that gives meaning to the fluid - the "POZ LOADS" label - explicitly situates the practice in terms of HIV transmission, and constitutes the erotic climax of the scene. Yet whilst the label's intended function is to authenticate the seropositivity of the fluid and possibility that seroconversion could be witnessed pornographically, the scene's premise is fundamentally compromised in numerous ways. Firstly, Blue Bailey was, in fact, already HIV-positive. After *Viral Loads* was released, Bailey was questioned on the health risks inherent in performing the scene, responding:

I requested to be in the video. The jar of cum was their idea but, to me, that wasn't imposing any risk to my health because I'm HIV-positive and a jar of cum wasn't going to change that or affect my health in any way. To me, it doesn't seem like a controversy at all.¹⁰³

Secondly, the virus itself is not able to survive for long outside of the human body, so although the ritualistic disembodied transfer of semen from multiple, unseen, allegedly HIV-positive people constitutes the exemplary "compromise shot"¹⁰⁴ and is visually shocking and spectacular, the risk of seroconversion from such a practice is actually relatively low. Whilst these facts of the prefilmic space work to negate the Morris' consistent claims of authenticity, the profilmic space is still structured in order to produce a sense of real time.

¹⁰³ Clark-Flory.

¹⁰⁴ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, p. 131.

By employing these aesthetic and formal conventions, Treasure Island Media are seeking to collapse the distinction between fiction and documentary in their films, generic terms which Sobchack argues “designate ... an experienced difference in our mode of consciousness, our attention toward and our valuation of the cinematic objects we engage.”¹⁰⁵ Whilst Morris is clearly parlaying in the semiotic capital afforded by the blurred lines between fiction and documentary, the political economy of his films are evidence enough that despite his eloquent articulation and defence of his work as seminal texts of a queer gay male sexual counterpublic, Treasure Island Media is not merely a reflection of an extant subculture and their practices, but a company in the business of making profits by marketing their films as representations of a subculture. If we are to follow Linda Williams’ assertion that pornography could be considered as a preeminent form of “‘knowledge-pleasure’ of sexuality”¹⁰⁶ and that, in a screen-mediated cultural sphere, it is a primary form of making sex ‘speak’ and discursively constructing desire, then Morris’ claims of merely documenting and representing the nomenclature of a clandestine ‘outlaw’ subculture ring false; in constructing the texts and (virtual) sites of his ‘island’, Morris is also contextualising the identities of his “cult of TIM.” The blurred boundaries between fiction and documentary - and the ambiguity of the ‘authenticity’ of ‘real time’ - is even more present in a controversial recent film by veteran queer filmmaker Todd Verow.

Genrequeer: Pornographic documentary

Nearly a decade into the sex panic surrounding the bugchaser phenomenon, and well into the height of cultural and academic awareness of the work of Treasure Island Media and other bareback porn studios, the prolific queer DV filmmaker Todd Verow, best known for his 1996 adaptation of Dennis Cooper’s novel *Frisk*,¹⁰⁷ produced a ‘documentary’ far surpassing the shock of *The Gift*. In *Bottom*¹⁰⁸ we are given an intimate window into the everyday life of a barebacker, ostensibly the person who penned a notorious blog, who we are to refer to as “Anon”. In the initial titles of the film, Verow notes:

¹⁰⁵ Sobchack, p. 261.

¹⁰⁶ Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ See *Filmography*.

¹⁰⁸ See *Filmography*.

This is a work of non-fiction which chronicles the sex life of one individual and is intended for mature adult viewers. The sexual activity has been edited for length but not content. It is based on the personal blog “confessions of a bareback cunt” written by bare_whore24. The voice-over narration has been taken from this blog and edited for length. None of the scenes were staged, re-enacted or directed by the filmmaker or the subject.

Everyone presented in the film is over the age of 18 and consented to being filmed. Faces and distinguishing marks have been edited out and voices have been altered to preserve the anonymity of the subjects. This film makes no judgements about the sexual activity of its subjects.

-Filmmaker TODD VEROW.

The trailer is prefaced by a warning, which attempts to attest to the film’s provenance as a ‘raw’ documentary, “from the infamous director of Frisk ... comes a new film so extreme, explicit, controversial, sick, irresponsible [sic], disturbing, deranged, disgusting, hot, unbelievable, that it couldn’t possibly be fiction.” *Bottom* is of interest not only for its thematic content but for its generic, aesthetic and formal qualities. Verow attests to the authenticity of this film, which draws on many conventions of the *cinéma vérité* genre, and to the film’s “realness” and promulgation of a sense of ‘real time’. A gritty, grainy texture of the visual images, a contrast of low-frequency reverberations and high-pitched artificial sound is present throughout the film as a non-diegetic accompaniment to the eerie, distorted vocals of the voiceover narration, which reads excerpts from the blog describing the blogger’s daily sexual exploits, at times synchronous with the visual diegetic action, and at times asynchronous. The profilmic space consists of a combination of observational shots depicting Anon’s routine of using online hookup sites to organise sex dates in his apartment, transiting through the streets of New York City to sex clubs and other peoples’ apartments, pornographic depictions of these sex dates, and responses to probing interview questions from the filmmaker. The viewer can rarely hear any of the profilmic dialogue, which itself is also distorted, however the profilmic dialogue is authenticated and visualised through the use of subtitles. Anon’s face and identifying features in his apartment are obfuscated in post-production. Although the ‘authenticity’ of the narrative is professed both by Verow’s linguistic framing of the film and through the *cinéma vérité* aesthetic and formal conventions employed, the film is defined by the tension between this professed authenticity and the distancing produced by the anonymity and the asynchronous voiceover which is supposedly reading excerpts from Anon’s blog. The ‘unmediated’ nature of the diegesis is particularly ambiguous for the viewer in cases where the blog excerpts from the voiceover are synchronous with the

profilmic space; if, as Verow claims, “none of the scenes were staged, re-enacted or directed by the filmmaker or the subject” and yet the film is based on the blog, what is the chronological connection between the two? The film opens with footage of Anon in his apartment, the cinematic apparatus disavowed through closely framed shots: Anon’s finger scrolling on his laptop’s touchpad (Fig. 4.3); Anon lying on his sofa using his laptop and playing with himself (Fig. 4.4); Anon in the kitchen (Fig. 4.5). As a documentary about sperm plays in the background, what we see is the mundane and quotidian elements of a lifestyle that is heralded as spectacular and obscene. Anon then receives a phone call and invites the person on the other end of the line upstairs; we then see a point-of-view shot of the filmmaker pressing the buzzer to Anon’s apartment and coming up the stairs (Fig. 4.6) whilst the voiceover narration reads from a blog entry: “I was talking to this video guy online. We stroked each other’s dicks at the gym once. He’s sexy enough, but a bottom. He’s doing a documentary about barebacking. He read this blog, and wants to shoot some stuff with me. Of course I felt very flattered. I met him last week to discuss the shooting.” The continuity and chronicity between the alleged blog entries and the profilmic diegesis both serves to authenticate the film’s provenance and raises questions about its claims of ‘unmediated’ reality.



Fig. 4.3: Anon scrolls through webpages on his laptop in *Bottom*.



Fig. 4.4: Anon relaxes in his apartment in *Bottom*.



Fig. 4.5: Mundane domesticity in *Bottom*.



Fig. 4.6: The filmmaker rings Anon’s doorbell in *Bottom*.

The film's title and its subject's accented description of the filmmaker – “sexy enough, but a bottom” – circumscribe a particular set of sexual relations and identificatory positions which deserve mention here. In *A View from the Bottom*, Nguyen Tan Hoang argues that, in contrast to the view put forth by Richard Dyer that gay pornography, much like heterosexual pornography, privileges the perspective of the top (or insertive) partner, much of the fantasy is structured in order for the viewer's identification with the bottom (or receptive) partner.¹⁰⁹ Hoang goes further to suggest that the past two decades have in fact witnessed a “remasculinising” of bottomhood, exemplified by the discursive play found in the breeding culture of bareback pornography.¹¹⁰ Importantly, by re-evaluating the supposed passivity of the receptive role and rearticulating this practice as active, vocal and demanding – that is, representing “an image with extraordinary power” as “gay men spread their legs with an unquenchable appetite for destruction”¹¹¹ – a distinctive shift in the erotic meaning of gay male anal intercourse is emphasised. Whereas the phallocentric measure of male sexual ‘conquests’ might be found in the top's count of instances of penetration, in both *Bottom* and in the films of Treasure Island Media, a bottom-centric subject position is interpellated through a language of hunger, thirst and consumption.

As intimated by Anonymous, it is the material substance, within the context of “rawness”, that is the object of desire in these encounters, rather than the emotional or interpersonal valences that they offer. We are constantly reminded of this fact by way of the quantified visualisation of a tally (Fig. 4.7) of the number of “loads” of semen that Anonymous has received. At the end of the film, the voiceover concludes: “load count: 399 ... 400.” This quantification of the material effects of bareback sex involves a clear intertextual reference to Treasure Island Media, who utilise similar quantification strategies in their semen-centric films. The eroticism of the materiality of the semen is further instanced by numerous scenes which depict disembodied semen exchange. In one scene, a friend of Anon visits with a collection of used condoms, pouring the contents into Anon's rectum. In a later scene, another friend provides Anon with a small

¹⁰⁹ Nguyen Tan Hoang, *A View from the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity and Sexual Representation*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2014, p. 10.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.13.

¹¹¹ Leo Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', *October*, vol. 43, 1987, p. 211.

bottle containing 17 loads of semen, which he then injects into Anon's rectum using a syringe. Towards the end of the film, during a group sex scene, a man penetrating Anon asks "what is it about [cum] that you like?", to which he responds "POZ cum," suggesting that the presence of the virus in the fluid accounts for its erotic potential.



Fig. 4.7: quantifying semen consumption in *Bottom*.

In *Bottom*, Verow employs aesthetic and formal conventions of *cinéma vérité* and clearly presents the film as a non-fiction work, yet the provenance of the 'authentic truth' of the film is also thrown into disarray through the protagonist's anonymity and the spectatorial distancing invoked through the film's sonic resonance whereby the film is framed "in such a way as to amplify this nihilistic/alien-like aesthetic with the blurred faces, otherworldly monotone sounding voices, and the men's subdued demeanours."¹¹²

Much like *Bottom*, the 2015 Vice documentary *Chemsex* transgresses the permeable generic boundaries between documentary and pornography. Whilst the majority of the screen time follows the standard convention of documentary – "talking heads' interviews and sojourns to follow the film's subjects through some of their daily activities - some sections of the film are indeterminable from bareback pornography. Indeed, the opening scene shows a semi-naked man, in low lighting, sitting on a couch in the interior of an apartment. A close shot depicts him injecting methamphetamine into a vein in his arm, followed by him experiencing a 'rush' and then immediately beginning to fondle himself, whilst answering questions from the filmmakers about

¹¹² Elly-Jean Nielsen, 'The Sexual Citizenship of Barebackers in *Bottom* and Beyond', *inter-disciplinary.net*, 2014, p. 3.

what it feels like and whether he considers himself to be “a junky.” In a later scene, we witness another participant at a ‘chill out’ at another person’s apartment, taking drugs together and then having bareback sex on camera. Interestingly, a reviewer of the film in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* responds to one of the film’s subjects - a former user - who claimed that using methamphetamines made him “feel like a porn star”:

This contextualises the film’s more voyeuristic footage, even though its explicit sexual content still makes it difficult to watch. This is because it highlights the differences between the drug users’ perception of sex and the reality. It is clear from the carefully edited footage that sex under the influence is far from the “porn star” ideal, with normal bodies, grubby socks, and one user using a hook-up mobile phone application to seek their next partner mid-coitus.¹¹³

Here, the (mis)reading of the eRotic optic of *Chemsex* reveals a striking disconnect in and of itself, in the failure to recognise the interlinked aesthetic and formal cinematic techniques deployed in both the documentary and the pornographic genres. As Dion Kagan notes, both porn and the documentary *Chemsex* aim to titillate and arouse, functioning on basis of ‘maximum visibility.’¹¹⁴ Whether representing the real through (un)mediated portrayals of drug use or condomless sex or both, *Bottom* and *Chemsex* cannot be understood purely as documentary films nor as porn, but somewhere in the intermedial space.

The blurred distinction between documentary and pornography is exemplified in the emergent genre of homemade videos depicting drug use amongst gay men. The ambiguity of this genre is found not only in the fact that they often lack the depiction of actual sex acts (although will nearly always depict users either naked or near-naked), but also that their erotic function (for both producers and viewers) is difficult to place. Initially circulating on the microblogging service Tumblr, where images, text, videos and links are posted onto a user’s blog but generally consumed through a ‘feed’ amalgamating all of the recent posts by blogs that have been followed, the increasing appetite for these videos has resulted in the listing of a “pnp” (party and play) category on the gay subsite of Pornhub.com. Typically, these videos will be filmed within private settings of bedrooms and apartments, often using the inbuilt camera on a user’s

¹¹³ Andrew Bianchi, 'Chemsex and the City', *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2016, p. 419.

¹¹⁴ Dion Kagan, 'How to Take Drugs in a 'Chemsex' Epidemic', *The Lifted Brow*, no. 30, 2016.

computer or device, and will depict the consumption of illegal drugs in a variety of ways, including inhaling smoke from a glass pipe or injecting substances into the vein with a needle. Whilst these videos will sometimes include sex acts after drug consumption – either solo masturbation or intercourse with others – what is particularly interesting here *vis-à-vis* the paradigm of eRotics is that the erotic climax of these videos – the pornographic moment of speaking ‘truth’ – shifts away from ejaculation. Particularly in the case of videos depicting ‘slamming’ (i.e. IV drug use), erotic climax is found in the user’s ‘rush’, which, in a similar fashion to the authentic moment of orgasmic ejaculation in pornography, is characterised by its uncontrollability, its inchoate corporeal spasms and facial expressions, increasing heartrate and heavy breathing. Considerable crossover between chemsex adherents and barebacking – as intimated in the film *Chemsex* and similarly depicted in the Treasure Island Media film *Slammed* (dir. Liam Cole, 2012) which begins with the film’s bottom, Jon Phelps, being injected with methamphetamine – results in a heady mix of discursive rearticulations of the eroticism of seroconversion and valorisation of seropositivity, with the accompanying text to the videos insinuating seroconversion, the sharing of needles between users, and even the seropositive blood. Given that a short video of under a minute - made by the subject with rudimentary digital video capture technology, depicting the injection of methamphetamine through a closeup and the subsequent ‘rush’ whilst the subject is wearing only underwear – is listed on a gay pornographic site under a categorisation for similar videos, it is clear that it is the immediacy, the ‘unmediated’ representation of a corporeal truth, that holds the erotic potential.

Similarly, in *Viral Loads*, through the tension of the dis/avowal of the cinematic apparatus, the authenticity of the scene - its proximity to a temporal ‘realness’ - is reflexively questioned. In the ‘Man Worship’ scene, director Paul Morris attempts to promulgate a sense of ‘unmediated’ realness which situates this work temporally in the present. Through the illusory ‘unmediated’ representation of seroconversion, Morris raises questions about the meaning of seropositivity and seroconversion in the ‘post-AIDS’ era. Yet whilst *Viral Loads* trades in the controversy of (representational) seroconversion and the erotic potential not only of seropositive bodies and viral-transmissive actions but also of seropositive semen itself, the immediacy of an attempted representation of ‘real time’ is betrayed by the inherent mediated nature of its representation in a pornographic film and its mediation through Bailey’s HIV-positive

status and access to antiretroviral therapy. In a pre-release scene that was made available for free following the media interest in Treasure Island Media after *Viral Loads*, the mediation of bareback sex (and porn) by antiretrovirals is further instantiated, this time through the use of antiretrovirals as prophylaxis to prevent HIV transmission in seronegative people. Whereas on the one hand this pharmacological mediation points to the end of the figure of the barebacker as an inherently subversive subject resistant to the regimes of gay sexual hygiene introduced in the era of AIDS - and thus, presents the practice in terms of nostalgia for the mores of a pre-AIDS era - on the other, it acutely illustrates an expansion of the discourse of the “neoliberal sexual actor” as reified through pharmacological immunity. Firstly, however, I will address Morris’ nostalgic claims of bareback in light of pharmacological mediation.

Body

Pharmakon, Barebacking and pre-AIDS Nostalgia

In chapter two, I addressed the recent emergence of a genre of feature films which employ a backwards-gaze, representing the AIDS crisis years through nostalgic AIDS retrovisions. However, recent pharmaceutical developments in the form of PrEP and TasP have invoked similar nostalgic feelings for a formation of gay sexual community *before* the AIDS crisis. Paul Morris frames chemoprophylactic strategies in terms of a new phase in the cultural history of HIV/AIDS that signifies a potential return to a gay male sexual culture in which HIV is no longer an “issue.”¹¹⁵ In the context of *Viral Loads*, Morris rearticulates the meaning of HIV by eroticising seroconversion and the very bodily fluid itself that encapsulates its transmission within gay male sexual culture. As Kane Race notes in *Pleasure Consuming Medicine*, the “Protease Moment” did not only herald emergent ambiguous temporalities for HIV-positive people who were previously expected to develop the symptoms of AIDS and head towards an inevitable death from the disease - that is, producing important new distinctions between HIV and AIDS through the mediation of pharmaceuticals - but also

¹¹⁵ McCasker.

produced new categories of HIV itself.¹¹⁶ The treatment goal for HIV was no longer simply deterring the onset of AIDS, but maintaining a winning fight against the replication of the virus within the host. The success of HIV treatment, and thus the health of seropositive people, was represented quantitatively, through the new viral load test, which was announced at the same Vancouver conference as combination antiretroviral therapy. The test measures the rate of HIV replication in the bloodstream, with the target for treatment being a level known as ‘undetectable’: where so few copies of the virus exist in the blood that their presence within the body is near invisible. An undetectable viral load thus becomes a new category of serostatus, ambiguously situated somewhere between negative and positive, and was henceforth “the central optic through which the truth of HIV was to be determined, trumping other measures of HIV health.”¹¹⁷ As Tim Dean suggests, Morris has deployed the term as a polysemous rhetorical strategy: “loads” in reference to biometric optic of the viral load test; “loads” in the parlance of barebacking in relation to the fluid exchanges that define the practice and subculture; “loads” in the sense that the specimen in question, presented clearly to the viewer in a glass jar labelled “poz cum”, is explicitly referred to in relation to it being “loaded” with the virus; “load” in terms of the “burden of terror” under which gay men have been fucking since the beginning of the AIDS crisis.¹¹⁸ In *Viral Loads*, the rearticulation of viral erotics encourages contemplation not only of the abject practices represented in the films but of broader questions about how queer kinship structures and the transmission of cultural identity are informed by a virus.

In the description of the seminal scene of the film, Morris further revels in the ontological ambiguity of the materiality of the fluid:

Blue got in touch with me the next day and said he wanted some kind of man-worship initiation. So I took a few days to set it up. When he enters the room, he knows he’s in for a real rite of passage. The willing, hungry lad gets gang-fucked by a roomful of studs. Most are poz, some are neg. *Who the fuck cares?* Not Blue, that’s for fuckin’ sure. To finish up his man worship initiation, we bring out a brimful jar full of more than 200 poz loads. Blue’s

¹¹⁶ Race, *Pleasure Consuming Medicine: The Queer Politics of Drugs*, p. 113.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Tim Dean, 'Mediated Intimacies: Raw Sex, Truvada, and the Biopolitics of Chemoprophylaxis', *Sexualities*, vol. 18, no. 1-2, 2015, pp. 240-1.

good buddies Dayton O'Connor and Drew Sebastian carefully squirt every fucking drop up Blue's knocked-up ass...¹¹⁹

Here we see the ritualistic significance of this type of group sexual practice as a rite of passage; in this instance, Bailey accommodates around 230 “viral loads,” suggesting that what is being transmitted here is more than a virus but a culture.

The rhetorical strategies deployed within the barebacking (and more specifically, the “bug chasing”) subculture perform the work of resignification of the virus by reimagining contagion in terms of reproduction. Thus, becoming infected with HIV is transliterated as being ‘knocked up,’ ‘bred,’ ‘impregnated;’ seroconversion is articulated as ‘initiation,’ ‘a rite of passage;’ the receptive anus is recoded as a ‘pussy’ or ‘cunt’.¹²⁰ In *Unlimited Intimacy*, Tim Dean points to the pernicious cross-fertilisation of meaning within queer discourse at the point of the coincidental rise of barebacking as a named practice and community, and shifts in gay politics towards discourses of acceptability and heteronormativity. Locating bareback subculture as a refuge of queer transgression in the midst of gay assimilation, he notes that “if the prospect of same-sex marriage raises the spectre of gay in-laws, then bareback subculture ensures that some gay men will retain the status of outlaws - a status that carries considerable erotic appeal.”¹²¹ For Dean, both marriage and bug chasing share a commonality as forms of kinship commitment that “confer solidarity on their participants.”¹²² In chapter 2 of this thesis, I noted that the anti-social turn in queer theory, spearheaded by Leo Bersani and embraced by Lee Edelman in *No Future*, presents a critique of the ways in which temporality and claims for futurity operate to deradicalise gay politics and affirm assimilationist drives. For Edelman, it is the hallowed position of reproductive futurity in particular that delegitimises queer transgression and offers the myth of a better tomorrow that will never come. The dishonest promise of the social order is encapsulated in the figure of the Child, the symbol of reproduction. Within the parlance

¹¹⁹ Treasure Island TIM, *Viral Loads* (Press Kit). Emphasis in original.

¹²⁰ The gender politics of the receptive partner in hardcore bareback pornography require a deeper analysis than the surface reading (of a feminine coding of the receptive role) entails. Rather than the signification of the receptive anus through the language of fecundity as articulating a reach toward the feminine, the role of the bottom in bareback pornography is an intricate codification of masculinity. See Nguyen Tan Hoang's *A View from the Bottom* and Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy* for discussions on the gendered coding and recoding of bottomhood in gay bareback pornography.

¹²¹ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, p. 85.

¹²² Ibid.

of “breeding culture,” reproduction is subverted and rearticulated through the replication of the virus in the same unbridled fluid exchange from which the Child emerges. The virus is cultivated, transmitted, “spread like wildfire;” within a queer discourse, breeding is mutated away from the survival of the species and towards the survival of the virus as synecdoche for a sexual subculture defined in terms of kinship. It should thus come as no surprise when Paul Morris notes that “no one understands who I am and what I’m about better than Lee Edelman.”¹²³ The erotic phantasm of this scene is seroconversion through sheer magnitude of the anal reception of HIV-positive semen, which both complicates the phallogentric logic of the primacy of the “money shot” through a privileging of an anal vision and calls to question the cultural meaning of seropositivity and in particular, seropositive semen. The textual description of the scene (which leaves Bailey’s serostatus ambiguous) and the obvious emphasis on a narrative of seroconversion indicate that the eroticism of this scene is to be found in the transmission of HIV (and by extension and through Morris’ formation, queer culture) from a group of men, some present and many not, to young acolyte Bailey; that is to say, a ritualistic rite of passage. However, despite Morris’ consistent claims that invoke the authenticity and unmediation that his work bespeaks, the actual reality of this scene does not follow suit, given that Bailey is already known by his fans to be HIV-positive. This raises two further possibilities.

Firstly, that it is not pure seroconversion that is of interest here, but rather, the transmission, reification and celebration of a material substance through which a virus is carried. This view might articulate that semen, as a rhetorically and culturally ‘loaded’ substance in terms of its life-giving potential, signifier of pleasure and power, and identifier of adulthood, can be a fluid substance with the power of transmitting meaning and culture. This reading recalls practices of pederasty in the classical era, which related more to the social than the sexual inclinations within Ancient Greek culture as a means of expressing domination.¹²⁴ In this sense, the younger Bailey is receiving cultural wisdom through material substance and specific sexual practice from a fraternity of bonded men.

¹²³ Morris and Paasonen, p. 220.

¹²⁴ David M Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love*, New York and London, Routledge, 1990.

The second possibility is, however, somewhat more troubling for the internal logic of ‘breeding culture’. If Bailey was already HIV-positive before this scene, and seroconversion is not occurring, can this practice still be considered ‘breeding’? In this particular context, the outcomes of the former ameliorate the issues of the latter; it is clear through the narrative of this scene that there is a fraternal transmission of something going on here. It is in another scene, released a few months after *Viral Loads*, that really complicates the logic of breeding culture and highlights the new cultural and sexual possibilities of gay male sexuality in a ‘post-AIDS’ era in which pharmacopower¹²⁵ has produced new categories of serostatus that have the potential to destroy the HIV negative/positive binary. Further, through chemoprophylactic strategies, the signification and articulation of bareback as the defining practice of a specific “subculture of risk” is problematised. The temporal and biopolitical status quo of HIV’s cultural history has been defined, in the Global North in terms of an epidemic temporality that is anachronistic (in its associations of a “return” to fatal infectious disease), apocalyptic (as harbinger for the end of time) and thanatopolitical (in terms of the governance of death). The emergence of effective HAART induced a transition into an endemic temporality that is also anachronistic (as the cultural imagination of the virus remained coded in the visual excess of the AIDS crisis), post-apocalyptic, nostalgic, deterritorialised (as the virus is rendered invisible and dispersed) and biopolitical (in terms of the maintenance of life through HAART). As chemoprophylactic and HAART strategies raise the potential of the severance of the virus from the very practices which initially provided the fertile breeding grounds for its replication, and then rendered such practices as deadly and taboo, which in turn instantiated the concentration of their erotic power, the function of barebacking as a discrete set of practices that define a subcultural identity is diminished. Excised from the spectre of AIDS, these practices are able to be framed in such a way as to suggest a nostalgic return to the golden age of gay male sexual culture, the years between the gay liberation movement and the onset of the AIDS crisis. I will now account for this sense of pre-AIDS nostalgia by analysing the first reference in screen culture to the emergent pharmacological strategy of pre-exposure prophylaxis, in the aptly titled scene ‘#TeenageTruvadaWhere’.¹²⁶ The scene itself does not harbour any particularly

¹²⁵ Paul B Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, New York, The Feminist Press, 2013.

¹²⁶ See *Filmography*.

interesting or noteworthy elements; filmed in an apartment with a handheld camera and rudimentary lighting rigs visible in the background, a younger man is penetrated by a group of older men without condoms. The *cinema verité* aesthetic is supported by two brief establishing shots; the first is shot from the top of a staircase and shows two naked men walking towards the camera, the second is a point-of-view shot that pans across a collection of shoes in the foyeur. Within a few seconds, the action has already commenced, with Josh Taylor on all fours on a mattress as one performer penetrates him anally and another orally. Although there is diegetic sound (breathing, moaning and the rhythm of bodies slapping against one another), there is a total lack of audible dialogue, lending an impersonal tone to the scene. What is of interest in relation to this scene, however, are the paratextual elements accompanying the scene itself.

‘#TeenageTruvadaWhore’ was filmed as a scene to be included in the UK Treasure Island Media film *London Uncut*, and was released for free in August 2014 on the Treasure Island Media website to promote the rest of the film. On the Treasure Island Media website, the scene is introduced as being “inspired by an email sent to director LIAM COLE by a young fan calling himself #TeenageTruvadaWhore.”¹²⁷ Treasure Island Media do not usually release entire scenes for free, and the timing of this release, following the media interest in Treasure Island Media after the release of *Viral Loads* and the increasing media interest in PrEP can be understood as advantageous.

Reminiscent of the narrative establishment used to contextualise the documentary realism in *What I Can't See 2*,¹²⁸ ‘#TeenageTruvadaWhore’ opens with a very quick shot of an email open on a computer screen. Although this shot inhabits the frame for less than a second, not leaving the viewer with enough filmic time to read the contents of the email, freezing the frame enables us to read the content:

Hey Liam
I am a fan of your hot work with treasure island media. I have been jerking off to your videos since I was 12 and you are still the best. I hope you enjoy my pictures and maybe jerk a few loads over them, as I have over your videos.
If you are reading this, please I have a request for future videos. Please one

¹²⁷ TIM, *The Pre-release Scene For London Uncut is Here! Watch The Trailer Now*, <http://www.treasureislandblog.com/news/weve-dropped-the-pre-release-scene-for-london-uncut-check-out-the-trailer-here/>, 2014.

¹²⁸ See *Filmography*.

day will you make a bareback gang bang scene with a bottom guy who is my age (I am 18). We are not all innocent twinkies lol. I have been fooling around for a long time and now I am on Truvada and I am definitely a total #TruvadaWhore haha. I love to be fucked bareback and take cum in my ass, and I have never used condoms since I started getting fucked in this day and age. I know older guys and parents think condoms for gay sex because they have experienced the bad times and the years of condoms, but that is in the past and now there is a new generation of gay guys like me on Truvada and we don't even need the word bareback because we don't have to fuck any other way. Sex with no condom is just sex, like for straights my age because their girlfriends use birth control. And believe me, although I am only 18 it is easy for me to find older guys to fuck and cum in my ass. So please make a video for young guys like me. It would be so hot to see a young guy my age being the bottom in a gang bang of sexy older men (from 25 to 40 years is my favourite age, but any big cock is good). You will be a big hit with our generation of porn fans! Hugs, kisses and licks.

#TeenageTruvadaWhore

In addition to the stylisation of the title of the scene, employing a hashtag in reference to a social media campaign to destigmatise Truvada users, this email, as a narrative framing device, is striking for the way it temporally situates the author in relation to both the bareback subculture and the broader cultural epistemology of condomless gay anal sex. The gradual and consistent decrease in self-reported condom use - particularly among younger gay men - in the endemic era has been attributed to a “deficit of apprehension”¹²⁹ whereby gay men who came of age *after* the transition to the ‘post-AIDS’ endemic era did not have the same shared cultural memory of the ravages of the AIDS epidemic as the previous generation.¹³⁰ As such, the balance between risk and pleasure is mediated by pharmacopower; by not bearing witness to or having cultural memory of peers dying from AIDS, some younger men instead “feel resentment and deprivation at the constraints of safer sex.”¹³¹

The author of the email above is representative of a second generational shift. He is 18 years old, and states that he “[has] never used condoms since [he] started getting fucked in this day and age.” As such, this does not represent the notion of “condom fatigue”¹³² that has been used to explain the rise in condomless sex in older

¹²⁹ Race, *Pleasure Consuming Medicine: The Queer Politics of Drugs*, p. 111.

¹³⁰ Michael Shernoff, 'Condomless Sex: Gay Men, Barebacking, and Harm Reduction', *Social Work*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2006, p. 107.

¹³¹ Mark J Blechner, 'Intimacy, Pleasure, Risk, and Safety: Discussion of Cheuvront's "High-Risk Sexual Behavior in the Treatment of HIV-Negative Patients"', *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2002, p. 29.

¹³² Adam.

gay men, but rather, a younger generation of gay men who have commenced their sexual lives in an era of chemoprophylaxis. By situating himself and his generation in temporal contrast to “older guys and parents” who have “experienced the bad times and the years of condoms”, the author is suggesting that condoms, as an element of a “safe sex” strategy, are an archaic intrusion to sexual pleasure and practice and are no longer necessary in the context of chemoprophylaxis. The author disidentifies with the very word “bareback” by rhetorically reframing the practice, suggesting that “sex with no condom is just sex” and likening his use of PrEP to the way that straight people of his age use the contraceptive pill. In doing so, he is temporally situating his manifestation of condomless gay anal sex in a way that presents a striking contrast to “breeding culture” and the notion that bareback practices constitute a discrete subcultural affinity. However, although the author dissociates himself the loaded parlance of the term “bareback” and its proximity to HIV and seroconversion, he still makes mention that he desires to be fucked by a group of “older men”, insinuating an intergenerational connectedness through a shared sexual practice.

Speaking at the World Pornography Conference in 1998, at the tipping point in the HAART-assisted transition from an epidemic to an endemic temporality in the United States, Paul Morris takes umbrage with the lack of authenticity in pornographic representation. He contends that “today, while gay sex is in the midst of a second 1970s, porn is mired in the strict conformity and conservatism of a new 1950s.”¹³³ This return to the golden age of gay male sexual culture is constituted by the emergence of a bareback subculture and for Morris this subculture is betrayed by its dearth of pornographic representation. He signals a similar nostalgic affect in dialogue with Sussana Paasonen, as he asserts that the people for whom he works - the men within the subculture - are drawn to his work because of “the sense of the continuity of a real and ages-old lineage of practice: we’re a living archive of male sexual practice.”¹³⁴ By linking bareback sexual practices to the sexual practices of gay men prior to the AIDS crisis, Morris is suggesting that a return to prior formations of gay male sexual culture - pre-condom - is possible.

¹³³ Morris.

¹³⁴ Morris and Paasonen, p. 216.

As I discussed in relation to the AIDS nostalgia genre in chapter two, nostalgia is a “longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed” and involves the “sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy.”¹³⁵ By negating, rather than celebrating, HIV and seroconversion, in ‘#TeenageTruvadaWhore’ director Liam Cole is diverging from the “breeding culture” in which the rest of the Treasure Island Media oeuvre is situated and instantiating a link with an imaginary historical referent in the romantic fantasy of an era of uninhibited sexuality in the throes of unshackling itself from the mediating effects of stigma and shame. This imagined continuity of an “ages-old lineage of practice”¹³⁶ is, however, a fallacy. Tim Dean gestures the impossibility of condomless sex as a signifier of a nostalgic return to a pre-condom era; for Dean, “barebacking does not represent a ‘relapse’ or a misguided return to what gay sex before AIDS used to be” because the practice cannot be excised from its relationship to the significant changes in gay male sexual culture induced by the AIDS crisis.¹³⁷ As such, for Dean barebacking is “an invention on the part of contemporary queers.”¹³⁸ David Gross argues that “modern” nostalgia is always constituted by the dual presence of two factors: “an intense desire to return to some or setting in the past that was more fulfilling; and second, a tendency to idealise that earlier moment by selectively crystallising its elements in such a way to make it more attractive than it actually was.”¹³⁹

Bryan Turner identified four key dimensions of what he termed the “nostalgic paradigm”: a “sense of historical decline and loss;” a “sense of absence or loss of personal wholeness and moral certainty;” a “sense of the loss of individual freedom and autonomy with the disappearance of genuine social relationships;” and “the idea of a loss of simplicity, personal authenticity and emotional spontaneity.”¹⁴⁰ The nostalgic paradigm produces what Turner refers to as “temporal Utopias,” pastoral images of a

¹³⁵ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. xiii.

¹³⁶ Morris and Paasonen, p. 216.

¹³⁷ Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking*, p. 5.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹³⁹ David Gross, *The Past in Ruins: Tradition and the Critique of Modernity*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1992, p. 75.

¹⁴⁰ Bryan S Turner, 'A Note on Nostalgia', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1987, pp. 150-1.

homeland lost in time.¹⁴¹ ‘#TeenageTruvadaWhore’ evokes a sense of nostalgia for a lost “Golden Age”, a “prelapsarian world” of gay sexual relations before the collapse of the supposed freedoms granted in the post-Stonewall years.¹⁴² Within this logic, the AIDS crisis is at once seen as an interruption to a libertine era as well as a catalyst for the drastic refiguration of gay sexual practices. In a study of gay men’s responses to bareback pornography, Mowlabowcus *et al* found that some older participants understood the representation of bareback in porn films as “a representation of that which they had lost ... harkening back to the ‘pre-AIDS’ period of their sex lives when ‘real sex’ was ‘raw sex.’”¹⁴³ However, in the same sense that a nostalgic reimagining of a lost homeland can never recreate what once was, it will never be possible to return to a gay sexual culture untainted by AIDS. Insofar as the invention of “safer sex” by gay men in the early 1980s was a response to the threat of AIDS and simultaneously produced ‘barebacking’ by way of safer sex’s opposition, the deployment of chemoprophylaxis does not engender a reclamation of pre-AIDS sexual practices but rather mediates extant forms of risky sex. Further, where barebacking as a discrete, nameable practice retails in the erotic potential of danger and risk, its mediation through chemoprophylaxis liberates the practice from this relationship, simultaneously detaching the subjectivity of its practitioners from a subversive identity. Situating ‘#TeenageTruvadaWhore’ in temporal contrast to the previous generation’s iteration of a “bareback subculture” and insinuating that the chemoprophylactic era can herald a nostalgic return to a golden age of ‘unmediated’ gay male sexuality fails to acknowledge the biopolitical reality that antiretroviral therapy overwhelmingly mediates the practice.

Pharmaceutical HIV prevention methods such as Treatment-as-Prevention (TasP) and Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) have effectively reproduced and re-centred a key contradiction in the cultural representation of HIV. In *Pleasure Consuming Medicine*, Kane Race argues that following the Vancouver declaration and the emergence of the viral load test as the barometer of treatment efficacy for HIV positive people on ARVs - a period that Eric Rofes refers to as “the Protease

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.147.

¹⁴² Stuart Tannock, 'Nostalgia Critique', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1995, p. 456.

¹⁴³ Mowlabocus, Harbottle, and Witzel, p. 213.

Moment”¹⁴⁴ - HIV treatment specialists and advocates became concerned with a “deficit of apprehension.”¹⁴⁵ With the publication of the effectiveness of combination therapy and the near-immediate improvements in individual health outcomes for people who received them, in addition to the relatively sudden halt of what had been 15 years of a deadly AIDS epidemic in urban gay centres, health specialists found themselves with the problematic task of increasing and maintaining the fears and anxieties of the gay community about HIV and AIDS. As Race puts it:

[the] new treatments raised, precisely, a deficit of apprehension. Increases in unsafe sex were conceived either in purely rational terms - in terms of a “mistaken belief” that the new treatments were a cure - or else in terms of misleading experience, the decreasing signs of the crisis having created a troublesome decline in fear. This led to several arguably disingenuous forms of education, which either insisted in factual terms that the threat of AIDS remained unchanged or else sent researchers scurrying to quantify whether fear was an effective motivator. The logic here was that if the threat of AIDS had declined in visibility, the task for educators was to provide a sort of fear-supplementation - the idea being to keep the fear “real.”¹⁴⁶

This view is mirrored by the views of Louise Hogarth in *The Gift* and the AIDS Healthcare Foundation’s Michael Weinstein, that the cultural project of destigmatising HIV in the ‘post-AIDS’ era is a double-edged sword with the undesired effect of producing a cultural HIV epistemology, particularly in gay male communities, that HIV positivity is an identitarian position that can be embraced or, at a stretch, desired. Race also notes that the particular economic and social factors associated with neoliberalism, which had already begun to take hold in the mid 1990s, produced biopolitical discourses around individual responsibility of healthcare and pharmaceutical regimens. For Race, “neoliberal drug discourses are deployed ideologically to produce a privatisation of consumption, engendering a fearful relation to the future and to others, and producing effects that are paradoxically analogous to ‘addiction.’”¹⁴⁷ Indeed, the emergence of PrEP as a viable HIV infection risk mitigator for sexually active men who have sex with men can also be understood through this paradigm. Of concern to HIV prevention and health experts following the ‘Protease Moment’ were the ways in which antiretroviral drugs were marketed to gay men, and the supposed links to increases in HIV

¹⁴⁴ Rofes.

¹⁴⁵ Race, *Pleasure Consuming Medicine: The Queer Politics of Drugs*, p. 111.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.107.

transmission rates. As Race notes, glossy magazine ads for the latest antiretroviral combination therapies often featured young, attractive people engaging in outdoor activities, countering the cultural representation of HIV positive people as ‘AIDS victims’ withering away in hospital beds; that is, the ads had the audacity to depict people living with HIV, and perhaps even enjoying their lives.¹⁴⁸ Yet this protease moment and the subsequent developments in the pharmaceuticalisation of HIV that have followed do not simply produce altered biological realities, but altered temporal subjectivities. Rather than antiretroviral therapy producing only political, economic or biological effects, or providing a simplistic sense of relief for HIV-positive people, Tim Dean argues that a distinct subjective anxiety is an “unanticipated side effect” of antiretroviral therapy, in that exposure to HIV constitutes a “double exposure” as the subject is exposed both the biological reality of the virus and the temporal reality of an ambiguous futurity given the inconsistencies between the former temporality of “the death sentence” which Dean argues has not been completely ameliorated by antiretrovirals, but rather “is merely suspended, not obliterated by the expanded sense of time that medicine now makes available.”¹⁴⁹ In relation to barebacking, Dean suggests that the new ethical challenges of a small cohort of barebackers who not only eschew condoms but also reject antiretroviral medication are of more philosophical and cultural interest than the reductive approaches of pathologising their behaviour. For Dean, the erotic practice of these men is of interest as their decisions “[pierce] through the psychical prophylactics that we customarily don in order to shield ourselves from the effects of time.”¹⁵⁰ As Dean suggests, the boundaries that separate Self from Other are found not only in the latex or rubber of the low-tech physical prophylactic, but also conceptual boundaries of serostatus, corporeal practice and subjective identity. The social, historical, cultural and political context of bareback porn is immutably grounded in the conceptual borders of categories of risk and safety, of Self and Other, and of the fluidity of corporeal and conceptual borders.

Debate around Truvada amongst gay male communities emerged in the United States in 2012, after the Food and Drug Administration approved the use of Gilead

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p.118.

¹⁴⁹ Tim Dean, 'Bareback Time', in E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tunkanen (eds), *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, Albany, SUNY Press, 2011, p. 76.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.77.

Sciences' antiretroviral drug Truvada for pre-exposure prophylaxis; that is, for the drug to be used by seronegative people at risk of contracting HIV in order to prevent seroconversion. As I outlined above, there are numerous aspects to this debate worthy of analysis, but here I want to focus specifically on the ways in which the debates about Truvada have reignited debates about queer sexuality, non-monogamy, and the rhetoric of responsibility. In November of 2012, David Duran published an article on the Huffington Post LGBT blog *Gay Voices* entitled 'Truvada Whores?'. Duran, who is based in San Francisco, takes umbrage with the sociosexual demographics of the uptake of PrEP amongst his peers. Although he concedes that studies have demonstrated the efficacy of the drug regime as a form of HIV prevention, there are clear delineations for Duran between categories of people who should be able to "legitimately" have access to the drug. He writes:

If a couple is in a relationship where one is HIV-positive and one is HIV-negative, then this just might be the right answer for them. Taking Truvada will decrease the risk of infection as well as decrease the intensity of the stress caused by fear of infecting your partner ... when used responsibly, and for the right reasons, this PrEP makes sense.¹⁵¹

It is worth noting the specific formation of a category of 'appropriate', coupled monogamy in the above excerpt. For Duran, as for much of the mainstream discourse, serodiscordant couples are constructed as ideal consumers of this new technology. However, in Duran's personal experience, "it seems that a good number of those running to get the prescription are gay men who prefer to engage in unsafe practices." He goes on to note that

for legit couples who are in monogamous relationships, [taking PrEP] might be something to consider. But for men who engage in unsafe sex with other men, this is just an excuse to continue to be irresponsible.¹⁵²

Duran's comments highlight three issues apparent in the community discourse surrounding the introduction of PrEP as a viable mitigator of HIV transmission. Firstly, proponents of PrEP have drawn on particular images of the ideal and 'deserving' potential consumer for PrEP, envisaged as serodiscordant (assumed monogamous) couples. However, the outcomes of the PARTNER study of serodiscordant couples that

¹⁵¹ David Duran, 'Truvada Whores?', *The Huffington Post*, 12 November 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-duran/truvada-whothers_b_2113588.html.

¹⁵² Ibid.

found that seropositive partners with an undetectable viral load are highly unlikely to transmit HIV to their seronegative partner during condomless sex. Secondly, PrEP use is viewed by Duran as ‘legitimate’ in the context of seronegative coupled monogamy, despite the fact that monogamy would preclude the need for chemoprophylaxis. Finally, and most importantly, Duran’s invocation of the notion of ‘responsibility’ is illustrative of the evolution of rhetorics of ‘care of the self’ in the governmentality of public health.

Unsurprisingly, Duran’s piece garnered a voracious debate and response on social media. Taking up his provocative title, Adam Zeboski started a social media campaign using the hashtag “#TruvadaWhore”, and followed this by having t-shirts in the same shade of blue as Gilead’s pill printed with the hashtag. Zeboski also printed shirts for seropositive supporters of PrEP, beginning with Blue Bailey, who sported a shirt that read “I#TruvadaWhores”, a clever textual play on the cliched marketing syntagm of “I [heart] x”, where in this case the message could either be interpreted as communicating adoration for Truvada whores or can also be read as “I pound [penetrate] Truvada Whores.” Several PrEP users penned articles online ‘coming out’ as ‘Truvada whores’, and the tide began to shift towards the reclamation of the term. In mid-2014, as the campaign was reaching its peak, Zeboski reached out to Duran, who agreed to write a follow-up article which recanted his views from the first. On the Huffington Post, Duran wrote:

I never thought Truvada as PrEP was a bad idea. For me, proper use of Truvada was breakthrough and in my personal opinion, a great option for serodiscordant couples. It just made sense. What I didn't realize at the time was that my opinions were possibly outdated and a bit prudish. Since my thoughts in The Huffington Post, I have spoken on the subject a lot and have been questioned by many. I now believe that whether Truvada is being used by a monogamous couple, a single promiscuous person, a sex worker or anyone who chooses to take the pill, is doing the right thing for themselves. Only that person knows if they are putting themselves at risk, and potentially eliminating another infection is a good thing.¹⁵³

What is illuminating in this recant is the way in which it demonstrates that even where the sexual moralism of the debate is jettisoned, the rhetoric surrounding PrEP constitutes an affirmative form of neoliberal biopolitics in which the individual consumer is constructed as one who makes calculated decisions about individual risk and safety.

¹⁵³ David Duran, 'An Evolved Opinion on Truvada', *The Huffington Post*, 27 March 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-duran/truvadawhore-an-evolved-o_b_5030285.html.

In February of 2015, the HBO series *Looking*, which centres on a group of white upper-middle class gay men living in San Francisco, produced the first non-pornographic screen representation of the PrEP debate. In the sixth episode of the second season, 'Looking for Gordon Freeman', the main character Patrick hosts a Halloween party, where his ex-boyfriend Richie and Richie's new, younger boyfriend Brady are in attendance. Brady had recently penned an online article in which he "came out" as being on PrEP, and the piece had "gone viral." In one scene, Brady is sitting outside with a group of other party-goers proselytising about PrEP. The dialogue recounts many of the key arguments surrounding PrEP in popular discourse. "If there's a pill that can prevent HIV," argues Brady, "everyone should take it." Others view the use of antiretroviral therapy as a method of HIV prevention as an unnecessary intervention. "Taking a pill just so you can fuck?" asks one man, "yeah, it's like birth control, actually!" retorts another. Brady continues, "in the same way that birth control liberates women, PrEP can liberate gay men." Walking in on the conversation, Patrick asks "how does having unprotected sex liberate anyone?" Met with unimpressed glares, he continues, "what's so bad about using condoms?"

As an emergent HIV prevention tool, PrEP has ignited debate within gay male communities who are struggling with the paradox of increasing rates of HIV transmission and decreasing rates of condom use. As barebacking practices have moved from the fringes of acceptability to being normalised within gay porn, the emergence of PrEP offers the possibility of dislocating HIV transmission from promiscuous and fluid sexual practice. However, inasmuch as PrEP can be viewed as a liberatory development in history of HIV prevention, enabling forms of erotic practice and promiscuity that on the one hand provided the perfect breeding ground for the initial spread of HIV and on the other were considered, in the post-Stonewall pre-AIDS golden age to be essential to the liberation of desire, PrEP is also emblematic of the expansion and modification of the neoliberal rhetoric of the 'responsible' individual sexual actor.

David Oscar Harvey suggests that rather than barebacking constituting a "specific and nameable mode of being"¹⁵⁴ that encapsulates "an example of queer world-making," that a "post-subcultural turn of barebacking and the refusal of an

¹⁵⁴ David Oscar Harvey, 'Calculating Risk: Barebacking, the Queer Male Subject, and the De/Formation of Identity Politics', *Discourse*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2011, p. 158.

identity politics around its practice” is necessary.¹⁵⁵ The justification for such a “deformation of an identity politic” in relation to barebacking is given by Harvey in terms of the inherent requirement of a discourse of “calculability” for the gay male sexual actor in the era of HIV/AIDS. Drawing on Foucault’s work on governmentality and biopolitics as “the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life” Harvey argues that the “question of calculability” and its relation to notions of “wager and risk” are central to the subjectivity of the gay male sexual actor following the AIDS crisis.¹⁵⁶ Aligning the U.S. government’s initial indifference to early reports of GRID to Achille Mbembe’s notion of necropolitics,¹⁵⁷ Harvey suggests that by failing to attend to the bodies affected by AIDS, the government exercised a form of “state violence by way of neglect”, or what he terms “soft necropolitics.”¹⁵⁸ The result of this neglect was a form of “autodidactic” self preservation through the invention of “safe sex” by the gay community; as such, Harvey argues that the gay community “became a laboratory for neoliberalism” as the privatised, “self-organised” community response to the AIDS crisis¹⁵⁹ was heralded not only by the community itself but also by the state, who encouraged the community’s internalisation of self-responsibility and adoption of the role of Foucault’s *Homo oeconomicus*, or “someone to be let alone.” As such, the homosexual subject was transformed from a subject that was “attributed with civil disobedience and hence beyond the register of any affirmative mold of sociality” and into a “harbinger of ethics and responsibility” through the self-imposed discourses of safe sex in the face of the state’s “soft necropolitical” neglect of the gay community’s AIDS problem.¹⁶⁰

This rhetoric of individual responsibility and the community-led invention of ‘safer sex’ practices thus produces its Other in the form of the discourse of barebacking and the construction of condomless gay anal sex as ‘unsafe’ and dangerous; as demonstrated by way of that which is ‘forbidden’ in the bareback porn films of Treasure Island Media, the Other is cast as exotic, and harbours considerable erotic appeal. In the

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p.175.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Mbembé.

¹⁵⁸ Harvey, p. 160.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p.163.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.164.

aforementioned episode of *Looking*, Patrick's questioning of the supposed inherently liberatory implications of condomless sex is coded as being out of touch with the present. Brady's argument that PrEP "liberates gay men" in the same way that the contraceptive pill liberated women does carry considerable gendered contradictions, however the analogy is demonstrative of the divergent cultural articulations of condomless sex in heterosexual and gay male contexts. In 1996, the same year as the 'Protease Moment' and the 'end of AIDS' in the United States, Cindy Patton concluded *Fatal Advice*, her "genealogy of safe sex", by invoking the concept of 'freedom'. Arguing that safer-sex campaigns centred on "finding and vilifying people and practices" that fail to conform to the emergent sexual norms of safer-sex have largely failed to save queer lives, Patton notes that the construction of condomless gay male anal sex as the single dangerous and deadly sexual act is a fundamentally flawed approach to limiting the impact of HIV on queer communities. The double-edged sword of producing condomless sex as an outlawed practice in gay male sexual cultures as the "only *one* dangerous act" simultaneously reinforces the legitimacy of heterosexual intercourse.¹⁶¹ Patton notes that condomless sex, "that sole act, not coincidentally, which is invoked by the national pedagogy as the citizen's 'freedom' - having the license to *fuck without a condom* is the new, all-American fantasy of heterosexuality rescued from queerness."¹⁶² In this sense, the potential for chemoprophylactic strategies such as PrEP and TasP to restore that license once more to gay male sexual cultures may indeed illustrate a form of liberation. However, as Cindy Patton and Hye Jin Kim note in a 2012 article in *Bioethical Inquiry*, the combination of "overly enthusiastic medical reporting of [the iPrEX chemoprophylactic trials], strident attacks from AIDS watchdog groups, and an almost total lack of public critique of the PrEP logic" has resulted in "an apparently unquestionable demand for PrEP as a personal 'choice.'"¹⁶³ As such, the debate around PrEP is fundamentally organised around the principles of the "rational actor framework", questions that "have always been the wrong questions for addressing the HIV pandemic."¹⁶⁴ What these debates highlight is a noticeable and

¹⁶¹ Cindy Patton, *Fatal Advice: How Safe-Sex Education Went Wrong*, Durham NC, Duke University Press, 1996, p. 155.

¹⁶² Ibid. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶³ Cindy Patton and Hye Jin Kim, 'The Cost of Science: Knowledge and Ethics in the HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis Trials', *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2012, p. 309.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

cogent shift in the conceptualisation of the subjectivity of the barebacker. Far from being thought of as one who inhabits an outlaw subcultural space - as is the case in Tim Dean's conceptualisation of the queer subversion of the viral fraternity of the barebacking community by way of the rejection of safer-sex rhetoric in favour of the reproduction of queer male sexual culture through the promulgation of the virus and the subcultural practices attached to it - the PrEP-enabled gay male engaging in condomless anal sex is reified as being complicit with the emergent discourse of the "neoliberal sexual actor" who makes individual, rational choices, managing and calculating the risks and benefits of unbridled pleasure.

Harvey suggests that "the appearance of barebacking in discourse is a rupture of safer sex and gay neoliberal rhetoric as it countermands the calculable and manageable gay subject that such rhetoric proliferates."¹⁶⁵ It is here that Harvey briefly invokes Roberto Esposito's conceptualisation of the affirmative biopolitics engendered by the notion of immunity. The discourse of barebacking is understood here as a form of immunisation by the neoliberal homosexual community against the practice of barebacking, and thus against "those who do not harbour [the community's] logic, manner of calculability, or norms." (p.176). By incorporating the discourse and logic of barebacking into the community as a means of immunising an imagined, rational communal body of *Homo oeconomicus* against the imagined individual subject of the barebacker, the multivalent and ambiguous meanings of PrEP as immunitary *pharmakon* are revealed. However, importantly, these deployments of antiretroviral therapy as a biopolitical salve for the health of the national public body also function in terms of in/ex-clusion. It is here that Derrida's account of the *pharmakos* is insightful. Recalling Plato's indeterminate use of the word *pharmakon*, in *Dissemination* Derrida argues that, similarly, the related term *pharmakos* (meaning scapegoat) is productive of divergent interpretations. In Ancient Greece, the *pharmakos* was a sacrificial body who is exiled and killed in order to prevent ill-harm to the body public. In the widespread adoption of an antiretroviral medication in regime in seronegative bodies, we can see how certain bodies and practices are to be permitted but must be located outside of the realm of the biologically-connected population. By vaccinating those deemed 'at risk', despite no clear evidence as to the long-term health risks involved in incorporating this

¹⁶⁵ Harvey, pp. 165-6.

poison/cure/gift/medicine, promiscuity is again returned to gay male sexual scenes and is able to be coded as 'healthy' and 'safe' so long as a pharmaceutical barrier between those practices and procreative monogamy is maintained. However, it is crucial to note the disjuncture here between bodies which are coded as deserving of eRotic pleasure and bodies which are cast off in accordance with their inability to be remodelled as consuming subjects of pharmacopower.

Conclusion

Far from its conceptualisation as a fantastical genre detached from reality, in this chapter I have demonstrated the ways in which realist bareback pornography blurs the generic boundaries between fiction and reality. Although the films of Treasure Island Media have been repeatedly lambasted in both the gay and straight press for eroticising seroconversion and putting both actors and viewers at risk, it is within this genre that the cultural meaning of HIV and AIDS and its deep significance within gay male sexual cultures has been most earnestly explored. This chapter has illuminated realist bareback pornography as a genre which acutely engages with the temporality of the virus through narrative, aesthetic and formal strategies which seek to enhance the sense of 'unmediated' immediacy. The development of the genre serves as an example of the broader cultural shifts concerning barebacking as a practice in gay male sexual culture: from an outcast outlier to a serofraternal subcultural text, eventually influencing the broader gay pornographic industry's move into depicting bareback anal sex and finally serving as an aesthetic referent for amateur productions circulating on the internet as well as documentary films concerned with the risks involved.

Crucially, this chapter has argued that the chemoprophylactic era has fundamentally reshaped the cultural meaning of HIV in the post-AIDS era, problematising the concept of 'breeding' and destabilising anxious narratives of 'bugchasers' and 'gift-givers'. With concomitant anxieties about the use of antiretroviral therapy as PrEP and concerns about gay mens' use of recreational drugs in sexual settings, the chemoprophylactic era can be understood as functioning along an axis of eRotics in which all gay sex is chemsex in one way or another.

Conclusion

Two decades after the announcement of ‘the end of AIDS,’ it is clear that the temporal disjuncture instigated by the introduction of highly-active antiretroviral therapy has not been sutured. However, as the pharmacological mediation of the virus increases pace, the cultural articulation of HIV and AIDS has witnessed a slowly increasing sophistication. In this thesis, I have argued that the AIDS crisis era can be understood through the frame of epidemic temporality, and that the post-crisis era can be understood through the frame of endemic temporality. Whilst the cultural articulation of HIV/AIDS has shifted since the crisis era, there still remains a temporal disjuncture in its screen mediation. As biomedical developments have been largely successful in hampering AIDS, the geopolitical axis of difference in health outcomes is emphasised.

To bring the disjuncture to bear and to conclude the arguments made in this thesis, I turn to two works which demarcate, in different ways, responses to the disjunctured temporality of the cultural imaginary of HIV/AIDS in the ‘post-AIDS’ era. Both of these works demand a radical reconsideration of the use of memory and history in the production of contemporary cultural meanings about the virus and its impact on

communities, and attest to the central overarching problematic explored in this thesis: that the rhetoric of ‘the end of AIDS’ obfuscates the ongoing impact of HIV.

Vincent Chevalier and Ian Bradley-Perrin’s digital image ‘Your Nostalgia is Killing Me!’ was produced for the 2013 *poster/VIRUS* exhibition. It depicts a teenage bedroom adorned with iconic visual artefacts of the AIDS crisis: ACT-UP posters, Keith Haring wallpaper, movie posters for *Philadelphia* and *Blue*, United Colors of Benetton’s ‘Pieta’ image of the dying David Kirby, and Justin Bieber wearing an ACT-UP t-shirt. On the bed, a laptop sits open, with the website Tumblr on the screen. In large yellow and black lettering on the left hand side is the title of the image: ‘YOUR NOSTALGIA IS KILLING ME!’ Chevalier and Bradley-Perrin’s poster articulates the tension between the newfound fashionability of a nostalgic appreciation of the visual culture of the AIDS crisis and the implications of that nostalgia for people living with HIV/AIDS in the present. Here, the retrovisual optic which mobilises prosthetic memories of the AIDS crisis through the reproduction of AIDS iconography is identified as threat to the existence of a contemporary politics of HIV. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the temporal disjuncture induced by the advent of HAART and the transition from an era of AIDS-as-epidemic to HIV-as-endemic is most profoundly illustrated in the tethering of HIV to the visual spectacle of the North American AIDS crisis in the 1980s and early 1990s. The constant return to this historical moment underscores the proclamation of the ‘end of AIDS’ by casting HIV/AIDS as an anachronism in the present.

A forthcoming short film by Mexican-American photographer and activist Leo Herrera may present an alternative mobilisation of nostalgia and challenge the genre of the AIDS retrovision. His ‘Fathers’ project, which is due for release in 2017, centres around a speculative science-fiction ‘documentary’ which imagines the present if AIDS had never happened. The trailer depicts portraits of famous gay men who died of AIDS, including Robert Mapplethorpe, Keith Haring, Vito Russo, David Wojnarowicz and Sylvester, with each portrait digitally manipulated using the same techniques deployed by police to find missing children to imagine what they might look like today. What is striking about this mobilisation of a nostalgic mode is its utopic rendering of a gay sexual and cultural politics without the impact of the AIDS crisis. Vito Russo is

imagined as running for President in 2020, Sylvester is depicted performing in Carnegie Hall.

Addressing three distinct and divergent genres, this thesis has argued that the screen mediation of HIV/AIDS in the ‘post-AIDS’ era can be analysed along the lines of temporality, territory and biopolitics. As the primary articulation of HIV and/or AIDS in contemporary cinema, the AIDS retrovision genre demonstrates the temporal schism induced by the ‘Protease Moment’ clearly, as contemporary screens mobilise intergenerational collective memories of the AIDS crisis. Interpellating a nostalgic gaze through the use of formal and aesthetic techniques such as the flashback, retro signifiers, aural triggering and metanostalgia, these films engender processes of prosthetic memory to enable contemporary viewers to understand the impact of the AIDS crisis. Yet they also engage in processes of de-generational un-remembering, contrasting a dangerous, pleasurable pre-AIDS sexual past with an apocalyptic demise and suggesting a sanitised, monogamous, homonormative present in order to ensure a healthy future. In doing so, the AIDS retrovision exonerates blame from institutions, politics and publics, imbricating the diverse sexual cultures of post-Stonewall gay metropolises in the process. Addressing the global network film *3 Needles* as a text which attempts to emphasise the global nature of the AIDS crisis and raise the awareness of global citizens, I demonstrated the ways in which the film reproduces the very disparities it attempts to highlight. Each of the films ‘needles’ serves to reinforce the semantic borders between its geographically distinct settings, deploying a colonial gaze which depicted the Global South as ‘barbaric’ and ‘uncivilised’. Whilst MTV’s *Shuga* franchise has been remarkably successful in increasing rates of HIV testing and HIV awareness amongst youth in sub-Saharan Africa, it similarly depicts HIV as a private health concern which requires self-discipline and the negation of corporeal pleasure. Finally, by analysing the mediation of HIV and AIDS in the realist bareback pornography genre and the controversies around its realistic portrayal of gay male sexual scenes in the ‘post-crisis’ era, I have illustrated the ways in which the chemoprophylactic strategies of TasP and PrEP have fundamentally shifted the cultural meaning of HIV and its depiction onscreen. It is of no coincidence that the first fictional representation of PrEP in screen culture is found in a film within this genre. As I have demonstrated, the mediation of HIV and AIDS – both through filmic portrayals of condomless sex and bareback sexual practices and through pharmaceutical drugs – is

indicative of the emergence of a new era in the history of the virus. The expansion of antiretroviral therapies as a mode of protection against transmission, rather than simply halting the virus' graduation into AIDS, demonstrates the ways in which the *pharmakon* produces an eRotics of HIV. Through this immunitary paradigm we can see the ways in which new links between drugs and pleasure can be imagined.

Whilst I never intended this project to serve as a comprehensive survey of contemporary HIV/AIDS screen fiction, the particularities of the doctoral project and my own position as researcher herald a number of limitations. Firstly, as a monolingual scholar working in the English language and located in Australia, my analyses are somewhat restricted to films in English or with subtitles. Similarly, my methods of searching for fictional screen mediations of HIV/AIDS undoubtedly elude screen texts in languages other than English, or without prior exposure in Anglophone media. Second, as the study is restricted to screen-mediated fiction, it is not a holistic account of the contemporary cultural imaginary concerning HIV/AIDS; the meanings and narratives about the virus are contested across various media and not limited to the moving image. Third, the project is limited in terms of its own chronology and temporality. When I embarked on this project in 2013, my initial research proposal was to question why there was a lack of representation of HIV onscreen; this year would, coincidentally, turn out to be somewhat of a watershed moment for filmic portrayals of HIV/AIDS after a decade of relative invisibility. Significant cultural shifts around the perception of HIV/AIDS, and biomedical developments in treatment and prevention, have similarly shaped and limited the direction of the project.

Further research could examine the conceptual framework I have developed in this thesis and interrogate its applicability to a different context. This may involve the analysis of screen media texts concerning other chronic health issues such as cancer, or resituating the locus of analysis to non-fiction texts. Additional research into the reception of fictional screen texts as pedagogical health messaging would also be beneficial.

The three analytic chapters in this thesis make evidently clear that the endemic era, characterised by the targeted deployment of biomedical pharmaceutical strategies, has in many ways witnessed an end, of sorts, to AIDS as we knew it. Much like in 1996, there is a positive optimism about the use of these technologies in quelling the spread of

the virus, albeit the scope in which these technologies are being deployed has significantly widened. However, as my critical analyses of the three genres of contemporary HIV/AIDS cultural production have elucidated, the spectre of AIDS continues to linger in the present. In the AIDS nostalgia film, AIDS is discursively constructed as an object of memory and a narrative through which the excesses of earlier generations are reconstituted as the cause for the crisis. In the supranational global network film, the spatial logic of 'patterns' and 'zones' of HIV and AIDS is reiterated, constituting AIDS as something that happens in a different place. In youth-focused entertainment-education in sub-Saharan Africa, a sexual politics of individual responsibility and the excision of sexual pleasure remains the key health messaging to prevent HIV. In the realist bareback pornography genre, the chemoprophylactic era is defined through the ambiguity between drug-as-recreation and treatment-as-prevention, as keenly demonstrated through the flawed logic that the loss of inhibition induced through the use of drugs in gay male sexual scenes is the negative side-effect, rather than the intended outcome, of the user. As the expansion of a neoliberal biopolitics which encourages the consumption of antiretrovirals amongst seronegatives to prevent seroconversion makes clear, the endemic era is anchored in immunitarian erotics. The persistent spectre of the AIDS crisis in contemporary HIV screen fiction reveals a persistent cultural articulation of HIV/AIDS as inherently 'retro'.

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