A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Communication, Culture and Technology

By

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Washington, D.C.
April 21, 2016
QUEER EMBODIMENTS, ABSTRACT DRAG, AND DEREK JARMAN’S ‘BLUE’

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ABSTRACT

An adumbration of the defiant queerness of its author, Derek Jarman’s Blue resists categorization. It is a “film without image,” a “visual document without visuals,” and, I argue, a uniquely embodied ethical exchange between the witness (Jarman) and his spectator. In his brilliant subversion of what Simon Watney called “the spectacle of AIDS,” which focused a punishingly voyeuristic gaze on the bodies of people with AIDS, Jarman bears witness to AIDS without visually documenting his body. Renate Lorenz would identify this strategy as “abstract drag,” an artistic method that utilizes objects, situations, or “traces” to refer to human bodies. In place of conventional representations of AIDS and queer sexualities are transformative “queer embodiments,” which in Blue come in the form of the characters, both fictional and remembered, which Jarman and his co-narrators speak into being. The most significant queer embodiment, however, is the film itself—and its demand for radical responsibility is an especially productive ethical and political challenge.
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INTRODUCTION

My academic and personal interest in the art of AIDS was sparked when I almost didn’t read Cynthia Carr’s tremendous, elegiac 2012 biography of the artist David Wojnarowicz. I had a side gig as a book reviewer at the time, and my editor, curiously, sent me *Fire in the Belly: The Life and Times of David Wojnarowicz* along with the usual bushel of small-press novels. I wasn’t familiar with Wojnarowicz, and hadn’t written about art or artists before. A quick calculation of the book’s density and significant length against my flat fee meant I’d earn cents an hour. I easily set the book aside. I don’t know why I went back to it; I just remember that I wasn’t going to read it, and then I did.

Even now, when asked why I’m interested in art produced in response to AIDS in the eighties and early nineties—why I choose to immerse myself in the rage and pain of what was essentially government-sponsored genocide—I can’t quite explain it. I’m a straight woman who was born during those crisis years, but far away from its epicenters. I don’t have direct connections to any of the artists or activists I’ve been drawn to. I know people living with HIV today, but the intersections of their lives with those years, and these artists and activists, aren’t necessarily for me to mine. So, when asked, I answer, honestly, that I’m gripped by the stunning and terrible coalescence of art and politics and sex on the site of the HIV-positive body at that particular moment. That I’m awed by the ways that artists used their work both to protest their oppression as well as to celebrate their sexualities and lives, often cleverly circumventing or flouting strict prohibitions against such representations in the process. It moves me. It inspires me. It’s something that I think everyone should know about. It wasn’t that long ago. And “it” is still happening, of course, though “it” looks different now.
Until I saw Blue, I kept my research focused on what was happening in the United States, particularly in New York, as most of the artists and activists I was interested in were, like Wojnarowicz, a part of the heady and ephemeral East Village scene. I was especially interested in the intersections of art and activism, and in exploring the nuances of political versus politicized art, and how, often, artists used the actual viscera of human bodies, usually but not always their own, as a devastating and powerful tool in both art and in protest.

I first saw Blue in the summer of 2015 in a course on radical and avant-garde film. By that time, I was planning to propose a thesis project on the significance of the body in art about AIDS, but focusing on the frequent absence of the body, rather than its visual or material presence. I had become very interested in the way that many artists, such as Félix González-Torres, used absence to convey loss. Blue seemed like a natural fit for my project.

However, despite my interest in the subject, and my instructor’s insistence on its significance and power, it took me several attempts to watch Blue beyond its first thirty seconds. It is a daunting challenge: over an hour and fifteen minutes of staring into a dark blue void and listening to what it sounds like to go blind and die of AIDS. Later, I recognized my initial reaction in Simon Garfield’s, who reviewed Blue and interviewed Jarman in his 1994 book on the history of HIV/AIDS discourse in Britain: “For 76 minutes you sit in a cinema waiting for the action, but the only action is a blue screen…altered only when your eyes play tricks, or when dust and scratches invade the print,” he wrote. “It’s a great blue, actually, rich and bright…But still—76 minutes?” (266).
Fortunately, like Garfield, I persisted, and was left stunned by the film’s radical rejection of cinematic convention, its inspired and complex acoustics, and Jarman’s narrative vision. The more I learned about its making and its maker, the more moved I was, and the more I understood that Blue was operating on a much more complex and powerful level than I first imagined. While I could see that, like the other artists I was considering for my thesis project, Jarman was using absence to convey loss, this was only one small facet of what Blue achieves. For one, Jarman was making a powerful political statement by refusing to engage in the culture’s relentlessly voyeuristic gaze on the bodies of people with AIDS (PWAs). Secondly, Blue’s radical plurality liberated it from static form, enabling it to exist simultaneously as a film, a poem, a radio broadcast, a projection, and an experience. The film, like Jarman, takes on a complex immateriality. Finally, it is this aspect of Blue—its plurality, its many “bodies”—that allowed Jarman to make a radical ethical demand of the spectator: asking her to inhabit the “body” of Blue, and possibly to inhabit his own.

Roger Hallas beautifully articulates what is so transformative, and so challenging, about Blue. Made during the final years of Jarman’s life, as he struggled with the onset of AIDS-related blindness, the film…

…visualizes blindness on its monochrome screen and thematizes it in the spoken script. The image and the word thus come together in Blue to explore the boundaries of visuality itself. As the film’s spoken script asks at one point, ‘If I lose my sight, will my vision be halved?’ … Jarman prioritizes visual imagination over the physical realm of perception as the ethical space in which the act of bearing witness to AIDS can most effectively take place. Blue thus rejects the
conventional visual components of cinema that render its impression of reality…The film image note only denies any sensuous or material figuration of the witness’s body it also negates the profilmic itself. (218)

During the same period I was learning about Blue, I read the book *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* by Renate Lorenz. Through the examination of several queer-themed works, Lorenz proposes a theory of art that is “embodied and at the same time acts with a certain distance to the body” (161). She shows how these works employ various visualizations of bodies that unsettle or fictionalize these bodies, which destabilizes, contests, or abandons them (161). She argues that this is achieved through different kinds of “drag,” which opens a “distance” from the body. In the context of queer art theory, Lorenz writes, “drag” may refer to:

…the productive connections of natural and artificial, animate and inanimate, to clothes, radios, hair, legs, all that which tends to produce *connections* to other things that to represent them. What becomes visible in this drag is not people, individuals, subjects, or identities, but rather assemblages; indeed those that do not work at any “doing gender/sexuality/race,” but instead an “undoing.” (21)

She identifies and defines three different types of artistic drag: “radical drag,” “transtemporal drag,” and, finally, “abstract drag,” a technique that offers visualizations of human bodies without showing human bodies at all, instead using objects, situations, or traces to refer to bodies (23). Lorenz’s ideas and analyses are all fascinating, but it was her discussion of the final mode, “abstract drag,” that sparked my thinking. This had
something to do with the fact that two of the three examples she used to illustrate the concept were works about AIDS: Zoe Leonard’s installation *Strange Fruit*, and Félix González-Torres’s installation *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA)*. It was immediately clear to me that abstract drag as Lorenz conceptualized it was an especially emotionally and politically resonant method for making art about AIDS.

Lorenz did not write about *Blue*, or about Derek Jarman, or much about film at all in *Queer Art: A Freak Theory*, but I rewatched *Blue* and saw an opportunity to apply Lorenz’s ideas to the film, and possibly to expand on them. It seemed to me that approaching *Blue* with Lorenz’s lens had the potential to reveal profound ethical, political, and even spiritual truths in the film. I abandoned my original plans to merely include *Blue* in a roster of works about AIDS that used the theme of absence, and instead chose to focus on Jarman’s film alone.

This thesis is the result of that exploration.

*Der* ek Jarman died of AIDS in London on February 19, 1994. He was fifty-two. At his request, his body was clothed in a gold robe from his film *Edward II*, placed in a simple and unadorned coffin, and taken to the churchyard of St. Clement at Old Romney, Kent, for burial. In his biography of Jarman, Tony Peake writes that also buried with Jarman’s body were several carefully selected talismans:
..the cap proclaiming its wearer a ‘Controversalist,’ the pen without which Jarman would never leave the house, his silver razor, his spectacles, his wristwatch, a comb, a bottle of poppers, a lapis lazuli necklace he bought while making Blue, a fresh fig and the tingling toy frog that, until recently, [his partner] Collins had attached to Jarman’s person so that he could hear him as he moved about the house. (Peake, 533)

While Jarman was of course much more than a collection of objects—with his artistic career culminating in film that defied materiality altogether—this inventory of his coffin does a lot to convey a sense of the man: the cap, an expression of his proud defiance of prescriptive heteronormativity, and his insistence on being true to himself as a queer man and an artist; the razor, the comb, and the necklace, testaments to his vanity and love of beautiful things; the poppers, a winking tribute to his unapologetic promiscuity.

Blue, his final film, premiered eight months prior to his death at the 1993 Venice Biennale. Following this premiere, it was screened at the Edinburgh Film Festival, and then opened in London in September. That summer, it was also broadcast simultaneously on Britain’s public radio and television stations, Radio 3 and Channel 4 (Wymer, 173). Peake wrote that the simulcast was met with a generally positive critical response, “especially from those who felt that by dispensing with the image, Jarman had made what amounted to a different film for each and every member of his audience.” (However, Peake also wrote that the majority of the 252 calls taken by the Channel 4 Four duty
office the evening of the broadcast “expressed horror and disappointment,” drily noting that four unimpressed callers “declared a preference for red”) (525).

In fairness to those who reacted negatively to Blue, it is a very difficult film, on several levels. First, and most strikingly, it denies every expectation of that a spectator would bring to a film, even an avant-garde one, leaving viewers adrift in a visual void without an anchor. Secondly, its acoustic dimensions are gorgeous and inspired, but disorienting—the distinct narrative threads of Blue, some of which are fairly inscrutable, do not seem to correspond to any one of the four narrators, who do not overlap or converse, and who shift between one another with no apparent logic. Its ethereal score is hypnotically beautiful, poignant, darkly unsettling, and jarring by turns. Finally, the film asks a great deal of spectators emotionally, ethically, and politically. This labor by the spectator is not just in accounting for Jarman’s illness and the mass-deaths in his community of friends and lovers, but also through the visceral and embodied form of spectatorship engendered by the film, an endeavor which Hallas describes as transformative and radical “dynamics of witnessing” (Hallas, 230).

Peake quotes an excerpt from one of Jarman’s published journals, Smiling in Slow Motion, wherein Jarman wrote about the difficulty of addressing the subject of AIDS on film:

No ninety minutes could deal with the eight years HIV takes to get its host. Hollywood can only sentimentalise it, it would all take place in some well-heeled west-coast beach hut the reality would drive the audience out of the cinema and no one viewpoint could mirror the 10,000 lives lost in San Francisco to date, so we
are left with documentaries and diaries like mine and even they cannot tell you of the constant, all-consuming nagging, of the aches and pains. How many times I’ve stopped to touch my inflamed face even while writing this page, there’s nothing grand about it, no opera here, just the daily grind in a minor key. (Peake, 515)

Jarman wrote that in January 1993, about a year before his death; *Smiling in Slow Motion* was the last of his many journals. He went on to write that he would rather his life be recorded in “an oratorio by Beethoven or Mozart, not in the auction sale of Keith Haring tea towels” (515). *Blue*, Peake writes, is Jarman’s oratorio.

Jarman, who was born in 1941 and spent a large part of his career as a painter and a theater set designer, began making films in the 1970s, and by 1993 he was part of larger movement of artists challenging the spectacle of AIDS. He was a founding figure in what B. Ruby Rich termed the “New Queer Cinema” (NQC), a movement in queer and queer-themed independent filmmaking in the 1990s (CITE—Rich). Film critics and queer studies scholars identified New Queer Cinema as “the cinema of AIDS” because of its subject as well as its narrational strategies, which reflect the discontinuity and fragmentation of experience brought on by the virus (Pearl, 23). The course of the virus and the collective psychological conditions it produces generated “new modalities of expression” (Arroyo, 85). José Arroyo also wrote of the “epistemic shift” in gay culture that resulted from AIDS in in “Death, Desire, and Identity: the Political Unconscious in New Queer Cinema,” which focuses in part on Jarman’s 1992 film *Edward II*. “We know different things about ourselves and we know ourselves differently,” he writes. “AIDS is why there is New Queer Cinema and AIDS is what New Queer Cinema is about” (92).
While the NQC is a movement as much about a specific moment in time—the early to mid-nineties—as a style and theme, Jarman’s earlier work and visibility helped to make the movement possible. Rich writes frequently of him in her collection *New Queer Cinema: The Director’s Cut* (though she mentions *Blue* only once). In “The King of Queer,” a short piece originally published in 1992, just after the release of *Edward II*, Rich praises Jarman for his insistence on being out, first as queer and later as HIV-positive, and for refusing to accommodate the “overt homophobia” of the British film establishment. Rich recalls that Jarman was always resolute and resourceful, from his first feature *Sebastiane* in 1976 (which Rich calls “nothing short of radical” 50), to the avant-garde, “beautifully-crafted, jewel like films and videos” (50) he used to fund larger projects like *Edward II*. She describes him as a cross between “Andy Warhol and Keith Haring, but somebody alive and kicking, warm and generous, irreverent and uncompromising” (49).

But, as Andrew Moor points out, the avant-garde is always deeply engaged with, and shaped by, its opposite: the tradition it seeks to reject (50). Moor situates Jarman, his work and persona within high British tradition, arguing that Jarman’s art and his politics were born from “an affiliation with time-honored romantic values, from which Thatcherism is seen as an abhorrent deviation” (53), and placing Jarman in line with the likes of Blake, Wordsworth, Wilde, and British filmmakers Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (53). Moor calls Jarman a “self-styled Romantic artist” (64) whose “confrontationalism is a consciously adopted posture” (52). This is less of a criticism than a way to illustrate his infinite, strategic queerness: Jarman’s “genteel anglophilia,” Moor speculates, may “be calculated to undermine the homophobia...and nationalism of the
Conservative government,” but is ultimately part of a battle for English culture itself. This is a national tradition, Moor writes, which appealed to Jarman, and is “queerly inflected” in his work and in his public persona both as an artist and advocate for queer people and PWAs (52-53). Comparing Jarman to David Wojnarowicz, Hallas wrote that Jarman embraced the role of “queer outlaw,” yet his public intervention in the AIDS epidemic was distinct in his ability to “address multiple publics” through his diverse art work (his writing, his paintings, his films), political activism, and engagements with the British press. Jarman’s “avowed Romantic conservatism tapped into broad-based high Tory anxiety about the Thatcherite modernization of Britain” (221), and much his work was dedicated to uncovering the queerness buried in English cultural history (Lawrence, 256).

Jarman’s importance as a public figure who was out as both queer and HIV-positive cannot be overstated. During the Thatcher era, he was widely recognized and admired by many for his “courageous honesty and disarming wit” in serving as, arguably, the most public and visible person with AIDS in Britain (Hallas, 221). He appeared regularly in the British tabloids and other news media, writing op-eds and letters to the editor on AIDS issues, gay rights, and popular representation of AIDS. He was also a frequent interview subject, with Hallas observing that when one interviewer argued that he should be spending more time on his “real work” (i.e., his art) than on his political engagements, Jarman countered:

It is my real work...It would be wonderful if it was unnecessary but it’s not yet even possible to imagine a situation where I didn’t have to do it. For me to talk
into your tape recorder is as important as making a film because these things have
to be communicated and they are actually, believe it or not, a matter of life and
death. (qtd., Hallas, 221).

The tension between Jarman’s insistent public visibility and the “visual ascesis” of
Blue (Hallas, 221) is a source of the film’s power. Throughout the film, Jarman “prays to
be released from image,” but this is because he has a deep and ambivalent understanding
of its influence.

For all this emphasis on the purging of image and talk of Blue as “a film without
film/without image/etc.,” the reality is of course that the International Klein Blue (IKB)
screen is actually an image, and a hugely affecting one. It isn’t static, either—not only
does dust and damage flicker and dance across the screen, IKB has a positively
supernatural glow. It may be a trick of the eye, or of the light, but to me the screen looks
alive, almost as though it’s breathing.

Jarman’s choice of this super-saturated, ultramarine hue is significant. IKB was
mixed and patented in 1960 by the French painter Yves Klein, who expressed his
“messianic, deeply mystical view of the sacred function of art” through monochrome
abstractions (Moor, 63). Klein’s ideal was to create paintings that were devoid of
representation, lacking any components that might be “signified, categorized, or even
positioned in a fixed place (Lawrence, 252). Klein, Lawrence writes, used monochrome
in his work to avoid dogmatic systems of symbols and narrative content, allowing
viewers to “engage in open, unmediated, undefined contemplation.” Inspired by this,
Jarman deploys IKB as a…
…heterogenous and omnipresent metaphor that disrupts the propriety of Heterosoc\textsuperscript{1} in the confusion it provokes. At the same time, monochrome enables Jarman to redirect attention away from the individual—so often the subject of representations of people with AIDS. (256)

\textit{Blue}, then, is a “refusal of representation. Unwilling to reduce people with AIDS to a fixed category, the monochrome screen dramatically reveals the artificiality of art” (252). (Notably, Lawrence mentions that Klein was opposed to “the ‘spectacle’ in painting, which he regarded as a “reign of cruelty’” (252). This calls to Simon Watney’s “spectacle of AIDS” and the “regime of massively overdetermined images” that dominate AIDS discourse, which I will elaborate upon later in this paper.)

Similarly, \textit{Blue} defies categorization. Stylistically, Blue’s “plural” forms—it is a film, a painting, a radio play, a soundtrack, a gay autobiography—enable Jarman to engage in both reformist and queer self-representation, two strategies that critics like Lawrence sees as opposed. The bottom line, for Lawrence, is that Jarman incorporates both possibilities without conflict. “The metaphorical thrust of \textit{Blue} [militates] against the existence of a ‘single universal truth’ about the epidemic, the meanings of which cannot be contained” (260).

* 

What is the “meaning” of \textit{Blue}, then? Its meanings are manifold and and visceral and immediate, and yet elusive, because \textit{Blue} is deceptively simple in form—just a

\textsuperscript{1} “Heterosoc” is Jarman’s term for “the powerful conflation of family, suburbia, the bourgeoisie and all the repressive machinery which shores it up” (Moor, 52).

\textsuperscript{2} There is a problem with Vallorani’s article that bears mentioning: it was published in an Italian, and it seems that Vallorani either had an imperfect grasp of English, or her translator did. The writing does not match the standards of the journal other works I’ve content of Vallorani’s writing is sound, and I appreciate the contribution she made to the discussion of collective mourning of AIDS
screen, a score, a narrator. The real “truth” of Blue is then, probably, that there is no such truth at all, to anything.

There is, however, the possibility to shatter the assumption that there are truths—“truths” that limit and silence and condemn some people; “truths” to which others, whose sense moral superiority is threatened by those they seek to punish, cling. In Blue, Jarman shatters the “truths” of genre, and of AIDS. Here, in three parts, I will explore how (and why) he does this, and the productive implications of this of destruction. First, in a section whose title draws from Blue called “The Pandemonium of Image,” I discuss what Simon Watney so aptly articulated as “the spectacle of AIDS,” a cultural agenda encapsulated by the exhibition and response to two photo exhibitions, Nicholas Nixon’s “Pictures of People” and Rosalind Solomon’s “Portraits in the Time of AIDS, 1988.” I begin with this discussion because we need to understand what Jarman was subverting before we explore how he subverted it. Then, in “Speaking Queer Bodies,” I argue that Jarman, in a subversion of literal visualizations of his body and others’ bodies, conjures a series of “queer embodiments” by speaking them into being, with the help of his co-narrators. Finally, in “Blue in Drag,” I return to Renate Lorenz and her concept of abstract drag, connecting it more fully to Blue and its queer embodiments, and ultimately applying the norm-smashing embodiments of drag more generally to the film.

But first, a review of relevant scholarship on Blue.
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

My previous work on HIV/AIDS and art has been somewhat narrowly focused on US artists and on the so-called “culture wars” waged on those artists through legislative and other means. The foundation of my knowledge is Carr’s biography of Wojarnowicz, and Wojnarowicz’s own writings, especially his memoir *Close to the Knives*; the compilation *Art Matters: How the Culture Wars Changed America* (edited by Brian Wallis, Marianne Weems, and Philip Yenawine); Douglas Crimp’s writings on art, AIDS, and activism; Chloe Griffin’s *A Picture of Cookie Mueller*; catalogues from various exhibitions on AIDS and art, both contemporary and historical; and Sarah Schulman’s work, particularly *Gentrification of the Mind*. While my knowledge of the US context is both foundational and complementary to my present study, it isn’t sufficient to understand Jarman.

To understand Jarman, I needed to understand the history of HIV/AIDS in the UK, which is deeply tied to its long history of the criminalization of homosexuality. Tony Peake’s 1999 biography of Jarman, while not the most useful source for deep insight into Jarman’s work or relationships, does provide a thorough and straightforwardly linear story of Jarman’s life, and necessarily traces the course of what it meant to be gay in Britain in the last half of the twentieth century. Rowland Wymer’s book *Derek Jarman*, part of the British Film Makers series, was also a very useful general guide to the events of Jarman’s life and his artistic and political motivations.

My primary text for this research was Simon Garfield’s 1994 history of HIV/AIDS in UK, *The End of Innocence*. Frequently likened to Randy Shilts’s controversial American epic, *And the Band Played On*, Garfield’s book is both history
lesson and historical document. It was published in 1994, the year that Jarman died—a moment wearily suspended between a decade and a half of AIDS and relentless death on one side, and the game-changing advent of HAART on the other. Garfield traces HIV/AIDS in Britain from what was later discovered to be its first case in 1959 up to 1994. Jarman appears many times throughout the book, including a dedicated section with an interview and review of Blue (265-271), which is a testament to Jarman’s importance and visibility as a cultural figure, queer artist, and PWA.

Supplementing this UK-specific history are other books from that era, including OutRage!: An Oral History by Ian Lucas, which chronicles the formation, work and decline of OutRage!, an LGBT rights organization formed in 1990. Jarman is also a presence throughout this book. The volume Taking Liberties, edited by Simon Watney and Erica Carter, includes many essays on AIDS and AIDS discourse to 1989 from a British perspective, as does the compilation Activating Theory: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Politics, published in 1993 and edited by Joséph Bristow and Angelia R. Wilson. Identity and Sexuality: AIDS in Britain in the 1990s by Philip Gatter, published in 1999, looks back on the decade and draws on social science literature to articulate the ways in which AIDS impacted the construction and expression of identities, particularly those of gay men in the UK.

But of all the critics, journalists, scholars, and activists writing about AIDS in the UK during the first decade and a half of the epidemic, none match Simon Watney, who was singular in his visibility, reputation, and prolificacy at the time. Watney’s contribution to critical AIDS discourse in the eighties and nineties is hugely significant to any study of representations of HIV/AIDS, in the UK and beyond. He began writing
about AIDS early on in the epidemic, and he also edited several volumes on AIDS, rhetoric, representation, and politics. His self-edited compilation of selected work from 1986-1992, *Practices of Freedom*, was especially useful to me. Organized by year, *Practices of Freedom* contains essential essays such as “The Subject of AIDS,” “The Spectacle of AIDS,” and “Photography and AIDS,” in which Watney articulates and condemns the ideology that motivates what he would call the “cultural agenda of AIDS.” Throughout, Watney is consistent in his searing criticism of UK and US governments for their bigotry and incompetence.

“The Spectacle of AIDS” is perhaps most germane to my project, due largely to the usefulness of Watney’s term: critics writing about *Blue* almost invariably refer to “the spectacle” and Jarman’s refusal to engage it. In that essay, Watney criticizes the “relentless monotony and sadism” (48) of AIDS commentary in the West, particularly in Britain. The spectacle of AIDS, Watney argues, is constituted through state-generated information campaigns and news media—a “regime of massively overdetermined images” (52). Through the spectacle, a “knowledge of AIDS” and a “‘truth’ of AIDS” are constituted which point to homosexuality as the ‘cause’ of the HIV virus. “AIDS is thus embodied as an exemplary and admonitory drama,” he writes, “relayed between the image of the miraculous authority of clinical medicine and the faces and bodies of individuals who clearly disclose the stigmata of their guilt” (52).

Watney, his American contemporary Douglas Crimp, and other scholars and activists writing extensively on representations of PWAs in the news, film, and other media during this period, are vital and illuminating in their own right. But their criticism also serves as a historical and ideological grounding in the pervasive and intractable
myths, tropes, and narratives attached to PWAs, and images of PWAs, during this era. Crimp, in particular, organized some of his most potent and useful criticism on this topic around two notorious photo exhibitions: Nicholas Nixon’s “Pictures of People” series, a portion of which was called “Pictures of People with AIDS,” and Rosalind Solomon’s similar series “Portraits in the Time of AIDS.” Crimp’s most useful article on the subject is his fittingly named essay “Portraits of People with AIDS.”

Critics of Blue, and critics of representations of AIDS more generally, often refer, both directly and indirectly, to these exhibitions. In his book Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image, Roger Hallas went as far as to call the production and reception of these two exhibitions “fundamental” in the problems of visibility in representation of AIDS (17). Crimp, Hallas, and Bethany Ogdon (in her article “Through the Image: Nicholas Nixon’s People with AIDS”) draw directly from the arguments Watney offered in “The Subject of AIDS,” “The Spectacle of AIDS,” and “Photography and AIDS” to discuss Nixon and Solomon, evident in part by their repeated references to the “spectacle” of AIDS.

The problems of representation that the Nixon and Solomon photographs came to symbolize were the same problems of representation that Tim Lawrence (252) and others argued that Jarman sought to thwart with Blue. Lawrence’s article “AIDS, the Problem of Representation, and Plurality in Derek Jarman’s Blue” is one of the most encompassing, and most cited, works on the film. Because Jarman’s solution to these problems of representation was deeply bound with the aesthetic and audiovisual choices he made, Lawrence’s article engages with much of the same discussions as Jacques Khalip, Kate Higginson, and Peter Schwenger (whom I detail below). However, Lawrence
contextualizes Jarman’s aesthetic choices by providing relevant biographical information; detailing the genesis, production, and premiere of *Blue*; and, importantly, anchoring his article in the significance Jarman’s relationship to Yves Klein’s theories of art and representation.

Gabriele Griffin framed her book *Representations of HIV and AIDS: Visibility blue/s*, published in the United Kingdom in 2000, around *Blue*. The first chapter, “Visibility blue/s: Derek Jarman’s *Blue,*” is broad in the way that Lawrence’s article is broad: she situates *Blue* within Watney’s and others critics’ arguments that representations of AIDS feed particular political positions, the most prominent of which presents the person living with AIDS as “a victim, to be seen as other, ostracized, and…at the end of a particular narrative line with is resolved through…death” (19); she provides a good deal of biographical context, including an emphasis on Jarman’s role as a public figure whose announcement of his HIV status was, he wrote, “‘politics in the first person”’ (qtd., 23); and, finally, she touches on many of the themes I’ve already discussed, including the film’s sensory dimensions, its complex narrative structure, and its political and ethical urgencies.

The ethics and dynamics of *Blue*—particularly those of viewing the film—are taken up by Hallas in his book *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image*. He writes of Jarman frequently throughout, but the chapter “Sound, Image, and the Corporeal Implication of Witnessing” is dedicated to *Blue*. There, Hallas probes into the film’s provocative and unusual form(s), its complex narrative structure, and, most importantly, theorizes that in *Blue* Jarman “[liberates] the speaking voice from its body through both visual and aural disembodiment,” which “produces the effect of
corporeal implication in the spectator” (229). This explanation of the witnessing dynamics of *Blue* and its “corporeal implication” are similar to Lorenz’s theories of drag, and paired together, hit right at the heart of what moves me about *Blue*.

Andrew Moor engages with Jarman’s whole oeuvre, touching on most of his films, writings, and visual art, and writing expansively on how Jarman’s work both extends and opposes the tradition to which he belonged. But “Spirit and matter” is anchored by *Blue*. Moor argues that *Blue* “achieves for queer cinema what Laura Mulvey had advocated for feminist film practice in the mid-1970s”—that is, an “ascetic denial of visual pleasure” (49). Moor writes that the film may be seen as the culmination of his preoccupation with sight and vision, with “the imaginative spectator,” and with Jarman’s particular flavor of “romanticized spiritualism” (51). Like other critics, he suggests that *Blue’s* significance is in “marking absence,” that it is “metacinematic meditation on the dilemmas of depicting what cannot be satisfactorily represented” (63). But his goal is to offer an alternative reading of the film: that Jarman’s negation of image is in fact a kind of sublimation, a religious yearning for the immaterial. “The blueness may represent a semiotic void, but it is still a signifier,” Moor writes. “…Its cultural connotations of spirituality or infinity propel the film towards the sublime” (63).

*Blue’s* unusual and rich sensory composition is its most striking and important feature, so critics of the film must necessarily engage with the aesthetic, emotional, and political significance of the sensory experience it engenders. For most critics, the primary sensory quality, and sensory experience, of *Blue* would seem to be visual. As Jacques Khalip notes in his article “The Archeology of Sound: Derek Jarman’s *Blue* and Queer Audiovisuality in the Time of AIDS,” a common starting point for scholars and activists
writing about *Blue* has been “the film’s renunciation of the visual image and its related displacement of epistemological, ontological, and ethical certainties” (79), naturally paired with a discussion of Jarman’s calculated choice to use International Klein Blue. That is, clearly, very rich starting ground, from which many paths are possible. But while all critics of *Blue* necessarily discuss its sensory/sensual affects and effects, only some organize their work entirely around the film’s sensory dimensions.

Khalip’s article is unusual in its elevated focus on the auditory. Reading *Blue* as “a significant model of queer cultural practice that is expressed in and through the sonic” (76), Khalip claims that critics have largely passed over the “sonic phenomena” of *Blue*, or relegated them to the periphery (80). He is right to point to the film’s auditory richness, from its strange and haunting score, to the poetry of its complex and interweaving narratives, to its unmarked shifting between narrators. But Khalip argues that the sounds of *Blue* are not merely sensory, merely aesthetic: they are deliberately and specifically queer in ways that relate to temporality, loss, and the utter limitations of language. The most important aspect of Khalip’s article, however, is the emphasis on listening over looking.

The visual is, of course, still important. In “Derek Jarman’s ‘Ghostly Eye’: Prophetic Bliss and Sacrificial Blindness in *Blue*,” Kate Higginson explores Jarman’s role as a “seer,” one whose literal blindness is compensated for with divine insight (echoing Moor). She theorizes the final scene of *Blue*—a vision of “an eternal queer sanctuary on the seabed” (78)—as Jarman’s prophecy of a “queer h(e)aven” that attempts to mitigate the losses from AIDS. “Jarman rebukes those who align AIDS sufferers with divine punishment, claiming for himself an insight superior to the ‘sight of the unwise,’”
Higginson writes of this scene. Higginson’s focus is on that final scene, but she uses that scene to explore the film’s broader themes, drawing upon Jarman’s other films and his autobiographical writings to complement her claims. (The “ghostly eye” in her title is drawn from the text of the narration from the final scene, which first appeared in Jarman’s *At Your Own Risk: A Saint’s Testament*, in which he likens his “ghostly eye” to the specter of the deaths of his friends, as well as his own imminent death. (90))

Peter Schwenger, in his short article “Derek Jarman and the Colour of the Mind’s Eye,” is concerned with the transfer of Jarman’s “sight” to the viewer. “This is a spiritual eye as opposed to the merely physical one…It is haunted by insubstantial ghosts that are mental images,” he writes of Jarman’s ghostly eye. “…It is thus the mind’s eye that allows the escape into bliss, and does so in this film before all else through the instrumentality of words.” (423) Here, Schwenger extends Khalip’s arguments (even before Khalip wrote them) by fusing the auditory and the visual. In *Blue*, this happens within the mind—Jarman’s, and then the viewer’s. Jarman speaks what he beholds in his mind’s eye; the viewer then conjures that image in her own. This “instrumentality” of words works “not only to produce images in the images in the mind’s eye but to produce change in the world—that is, the image-making capacity of words is political” (423). Schwenger elaborates on this later on in his article, writing that literal images of AIDS enter the eye “passively,” without a sense of hope or capacity for change (this “passive” consumption of images of AIDS may be an oblique reference to Watney’s “spectacle”).

Like Schwenger and also Griffin, Nicoletta Vallorani argues that a sense of loss is realized through the absence of a literal body for the viewer to behold (85) in her article “Path(o)s of Mourning: Memory, Death, and the Invisible Body in Derek Jarman’s *Blue.*”
But, uniquely, Vallorani amplifies this argument to a collective, community level. The film is both potently individual—in that it refers to a specific artist’s body, and to this specific sickness—and intensely political, and therefore collective. For Vallorani, Jarman’s sick body becomes symbolic of, or referential to, the “infected social body” which must absorb and endure its grief. Vallorani’s aim is to use *Blue* to theorize the public mourning of AIDS losses in the early nineties (82). She concludes that *Blue* triggers a “double catharsis” that aided Jarman in facing his own death while simultaneously gathering a community of viewers around a work of art that commemorates not just this individual death, but many deaths (89). This is a kind of pre-emptive mourning, Vallorani writes, in which the community “tries to sew up the rip” produced by AIDS. Jarman mends the rip by “revising the very relationship between body and sexual choices, body and identity, and ultimately, body and death” (89).²

Finally, in “The Flowers of Pestilence: Flower Imagery in AIDS Discourse and the Literature of Disease,” Amy Harris claims that people making art about AIDS often use the flower as an emblem and “metaphorical link” between the world of reason and the “submerged world of memory, sickness, and pain.” The fecundity and mortality of the flower have powerful symbolic implications for the HIV-positive body in literature and other art. While Harris mentions Jarman only tangentially, her discussion illuminates much of the floral and natural imagery in *Blue*, especially given the importance of flowers and gardening in Jarman’s life.

² There is a problem with Vallorani’s article that bears mentioning: it was published in an Italian, and it seems that Vallorani either had an imperfect grasp of English, or her translator did. The writing does not match the standards of the journal other works I’ve content of Vallorani’s writing is sound, and I appreciate the contribution she made to the discussion of collective mourning of AIDS deaths.
PART I: “THE PANDEMONIUM OF IMAGE”

Gabriele Griffin briefly compares *Blue* to the 1993 documentary *Silverlake Life: The View from Here*, which chronicles the last months of the relationship of a Los Angeles couple, Tom Joslin and Mark Massi, as both men near their deaths from AIDS. Massi and Joslin shot most of the footage themselves with a hand-held video camera, giving viewers a very intimate look at their lives and deaths. Joslin dies near the end of the film. Immediately after his death, Massi, greatly distraught, turns the camera to Joslin’s shockingly diminished and lesion-covered body, creating an image reminiscent of deathbed portraits by David Wojnarowicz and AA Bronson. “Isn’t he beautiful?” Massi asks, before starting to sing “You Are My Sunshine” in voice quavering with barely-contained grief and panic. The camera, meanwhile, remains close and focused on Joslin’s still and silent face. It is an emotionally shattering scene in an already devastating film.

Like *Blue*, *Silverlake Life* is a film that defies conventional representation of AIDS. Griffin quotes Peggy Phelan, who wrote that *Silverlake Life* reverses “the mainstream cultural imperative that constructs AIDS as shameful, humiliating, and obscene” and gives “the dwindling materiality of the AIDS body an awesome ocular weight” (qtd. in Griffin, 18). But unlike the documentary, *Blue* does not present the viewer with a human body to behold. “Instead,” Griffin writes, “it both escapes, and returns us to, the experience of AIDS as a specific physiological occurrence—it asks the viewer, what do you expect to see?” (18). She writes that Jarman did not choose the documentary route because that would have necessitated charting his body’s decline and
repeating a straightforward “diagnosis to death” narrative, and for someone as self-admittedly vain as Jarman, to showcase his physical deterioration would be “the actualization of a…nightmare.” She notes that in his autobiographical writings, before he made *Blue*, Jarman wrote that he feared disfigurement more than the illness itself, and that he felt physically “marked” as a person with HIV. Griffin claims, in much the same line as other critics, that Jarman’s fear of losing his looks and his mourning for the physical changes that his illness wrought is “met in *Blue* by the absence of image.” But here Griffin’s observations extend beyond her colleagues’: in *Blue*, she writes, “the mourning of the loss of the body beautiful is…achieved differently, through the creation of another body beautiful, the film” (18).

Griffin’s phrasing highlights the poetic poignancy and effectiveness of mourning a loss through creation: Jarman had no control over the epidemic nor the catastrophic destruction it wreaked, but he was empowered to answer it with art (rather like the way he cultivated a garden while he was dying). Out of absence, presence; from death, life. But Griffin also alludes to something that Hallas expands on: the idea of *Blue*, the film, as a kind of embodiment. Without a body or a conventional image, *Blue* contains and embodies Jarman, the characters he conjures, and even the spectator. All of these bodies are imagined and mediated through the IKB screen, whose chromatic constancy “prompts us also to notice the scratches and nicks on the celluloid, distinct reminders of its historical materiality” (Hallas, 218). After all, films, like human bodies, show their scars and wrinkles with time.

And yet, *Blue* is merely disguised as film (albeit an unconventional one). It isn’t really a film, or at least it doesn’t have to be. For one, it was broadcast on Britain’s
Channel 4 public television station, and then its soundtrack on Radio 3, which encouraged listeners without access to a television to write in to request large blue cards they could stare at during the transmission (Wymer, 173). Further, simply listening to the soundtrack, or reading the text like a poem, is a richly sensuous and moving experience. *Blue* takes, at once, no form and many forms. Hallas recounts an installation of *Blue* at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis that demonstrates the extent to which *Blue* can be liberated from nearly any form it’s molded in to, existing in some immaterial spiritual space accessed with only a little technical and spiritual imagination. The curators at the Walker realized that their 35mm copy of *Blue* would be quickly and severely degraded by continuous looping in the gallery over the two-year course of the installation. Their solution was to rig up a “film simulation,” achieved with a color-gelled stage light, a metal gobo, and a flicker-generating device. “*Blue* had literally become pure light,” Hallas writes. “Its visual aspect was freed from the temporal bounds of the filmstrip, but it also now lacked the material foundation of a film body that registers its history through marks left on its ‘skin’” (235). Jarman provided the means for the film to transcend the degradations of time and tear, just as he escaped having to document the deterioration of his own body.

Jarman’s refusal to show his body wasn’t purely motivated by vanity, of course; he was pointedly undercutting the spectacle of AIDS. But he was also in some ways escaping the bounds of his own mortal and afflicted and suffering body. Jarman facilitated this escape with a score, a screen, and some text. He (and his co-narrators) spoke that text into life, conjuring fleeting visions, dreamy memories, and epic stories, all populated by a kaleidoscopic cast of characters. These characters vary in form, tone, and
elusiveness, but they are all complexly immaterial, and all the more powerful for it. Jarman himself is one of them.

But to escape corporeal limitations and to thwart the spectacle of AIDS was a privilege. In the eighties and nineties, PWAs were very much bound by the fictions, stigmas, and other limitations prescribed upon them (to say nothing of their physical and emotional suffering). These fictions were not the dreamy fantasies that Jarman conjured; these fictions were inspired by fear and by hate.

No one articulates these motivations on a massive scale and their results better than Watney, who is worth quoting at length:

The…subject of AIDS is the person with AIDS, bound, gagged and hidden away behind the antiseptic screens and curtains of AIDS commentary, which are occasionally pulled to one side in order to reveal the elaborately stage-managed spectacle of the monstrous. This is the *ne plus ultra* of the cultural agenda of AIDS, and the moment at which we are permitted to ‘identify’ with AIDS, and simultaneously denied the possibility of identifying with its suffers. The ‘look’ of AIDS thus guarantees that it is made visible (and remembered and dreamed and dreaded) as if it were indeed a unitary phenomenon, stamping its ‘victims’ with the unmistakable and irrefutable signs of the innately degenerate. We thus ‘see’ AIDS under two guises. First, as ‘the AIDS virus,’ materialized by the technologies of computer graphics and electron microscopy, floating like some alien spacecraft in a dense space of violently saturated color. Second, we ‘see’ AIDS in living bodies which have all been stripped of the sensual luxury of flesh, and in faces which are blistered and swollen beyond human recognition. Such images are calculated to
appeal to the sadistic. They embody the entire cultural agenda of AIDS at its most concentrated, efficient, and revealing. They tell us unambiguously: ‘This is what AIDS looks like.’ They forbid any further enquiry. (Watney, “The Subject of AIDS,” 28)

This passage is from Watney’s 1987 essay “The Subject of AIDS.” Watney, as I’ve discussed, dedicated a great deal of his work during the eighties and nineties to criticizing how AIDS discourse was constructed, and why it was so toxic and damning to PWAs and to gay men. In this particular essay, Watney shows how the “cultural agenda of AIDS” relies heavily on a limited set of words and images, any one of which “can stand in isolation for the logic of the total structure” (23). While Watney is largely focused on representations of AIDS in the news media, here and elsewhere (namely “Photography and AIDS”), Watney expertly articulates the ideology that motivates the more insidious representations of AIDS in other media, particularly in documentary portraiture, which became a flashpoint for other critics of representations of AIDS.

Those writing about Blue, and critics of representations of AIDS more generally, often refer, both directly and indirectly, to two controversial 1988 photographic exhibitions: Nicholas Nixon’s “Pictures of People,” a portion of which was called “Pictures of People with AIDS,” and Rosalind Solomon’s “Portraits in the Time of AIDS.” These two exhibitions have more in common than subject and style; they were both first exhibited in 1988, both expanded into standalone books, and, most of all, their glowing, self-congratulatory reception from art critics was swiftly followed by intense and enduring protest by AIDS activists. Recall that Hallas wrote that the production and reception of these two exhibitions were “fundamental” in displaying the problems of
visibility in representation of AIDS (17). Watney did not write about these exhibitions specifically, but other critics—Hallas and Ogdon, in particular—drew directly from the arguments he offered in “The Subject of AIDS,” “The Spectacle of AIDS,” and “Photography and AIDS” to discuss Nixon and Solomon, evident in part by their repeated references to the “spectacle” of AIDS. A strong line can drawn from Watney, to criticism of Nicholas and Solomon, to Jarman and those who wrote about Blue.

Nearly always set in a hospital, nearly always in black-and-white, the style of these photographs is inevitably what comes to mind when asked to conjure “photographs of PWAs”: Christ-like figures wasting in hospital beds; constellations of Kaposi’s sarcoma lesions scattered across faces, limbs and chests; the alarming yet graceful protrusion of vertebrae and ribs. There are many facial close-ups, in which the subject stares back gaunt and dull-eyed. The subjects are usually alone. Framed as “empathetic” and “humanizing,” and praised by the art establishment, these exhibitions proved that “the spectacle of AIDS was as much a problem of the humanism of social documentary photography as it was of the melodramatic hysteria of news coverage” (Hallas, 18). The problems with this style of photography are multitude, but Watney, Crimp, Hallas, and Ogdon all emphasize two main offenses: overdetermination and depoliticization.

According to these critics (excepting Watney, who wrote about AIDS and photography but not about these portraits specifically), Nixon and Solomon’s portrayals of PWAs fixed a “pathological gaze” upon its subjects (Hallas, 169), doing little more than replicating standard media images of debilitated, helpless victims, and suggesting they were as good as dead. Crimp argues that Nixon’s photographs “[reiterate] what we have already been told or shown about people with AIDS: that they are ravaged,
disfigured, and debilitated by their syndrome,” he wrote. “They are generally alone, desperate, but resigned to their ‘inevitable’ deaths” (85). Ogdon echoes Crimp, writing that the “rigid equation that Nixon’s PWA project proposed, AIDS=death, transformed his photographic subjects from distinct and distinguishable social beings into interchangeable examples of that equation.” In Nixon’s photographs of PWAs, “human bodies seem to function merely as screens on which the ‘truth’ of AIDS (death) is made to materialize” (76). These photographs, with their intense scrutiny of bodily detail and decontextualized settings, strip the subject of complexity and agency, and mute the experience of living with AIDS. Crimp levels a similar critique to Solomon’s work (87, 91-92, 97). While these portraits purported to “register the ‘true selves’” of their subjects—and were praised for it—they in fact engendered a complete erasure of identity for the PWAs they portrayed (Hallas, 18).

The second charge, depoliticization, was first seized upon by ACT UP, which protested the opening of Nixon’s exhibition at the MoMA. In “Portraits of People with AIDS,” Crimp reports that the activists outside the museum handed out a flier titled “NO MORE PICTURES WITHOUT CONTEXT” that demanded the “visibility of PWAs who are vibrant, angry, loving, sexy, beautiful, acting up and fighting back.” But they didn’t only demand positive and accurate representation of PWAs; they protested the fact that Nixon’s photographs obscured the social and political forces that enabled the disease to flourish. The PWA is a human being whose health has deteriorated not simply due to a virus, ACT UP’s flier stated, but due to “government inaction, the inaccessibility of affordable health care, and institutionalized neglect in the forms of heterosexism, racism, and sexism” (83-86). Crimp writes that portrayals like Nixon’s and Solomon’s grew out
of the liberal position that “bureaucratic abstraction” was one of the central problems of AIDS. The answer to this problem, this position concluded (according to Crimp), was “to ‘give AIDS a face,’ to ‘bring AIDS home’” (88). However, he wrote that these attempts fail because they almost inevitably abstract the experience of living with AIDS away from the “determining context” of major institutions of governance and health care. In these representations, “people with AIDS are kept safely within the boundaries of their private tragedies,” Crimp wrote. “No one utters a word about the politics of AIDS, the mostly deliberate failure of public policy at every level of government to stem the course of the epidemic” (91). Watney, though not writing specifically about Nixon or Solomon, puts it aptly, arguing that “by being repeatedly individualized, AIDS is subtly and efficiently depoliticized” (Watney, “Photography and AIDS,” 187).

The Nixon and Solomon portraits, and the criticism they sparked, clearly demonstrate the “problems of visibility” in representations of AIDS in general, and help to construct a picture of late-eighties AIDS discourse. But, the reader may still wonder where to find Blue in this discussion: wouldn’t it make more sense to compare Blue to other films about AIDS? Normally, yes—I would grant that comparing one piece of art to another piece of art in the same medium would likely result in the most coherent and convincing analysis. Normally. But Blue is not a normal film.

In fact, Blue resists being categorized by as a film at all. Taking Klein’s influence into account, as well as Jarman’s own primary identification as a painter and not a filmmaker (Hallas, 224), Blue may be more akin to a painting with a lyrical soundtrack. Hallas and others agree that Blue rejects all the conventions of cinema: cinematography, visual editing, mise en scène (218). It’s a film without film, a “film without images”
(Moor, 49), a “visual document without visuals” (Khalip, 76). Blue’s narrators warn the listener against the “pandemonium of image.” They declare that “image is the prison of the soul”; they implore us to pray, from the bottom of our hearts, “to be released from image.” The ACT UP flier demanded that spectators stop looking at PWAs and start listening to them, which Higginson wrote was a call to which Blue, with “its static blue screen augmenting the prominence of the accompanying soundscape, arguably responds” (79)^3. I, too, respond to that call by siting “Pictures of People” and “Portraits in the Time of AIDS” directly opposite Blue. These were the images from which Jarman prayed for release, and which might have made his creeping blindness a kind of terrible relief.

^3 Notably, many scholars writing about Blue — Higginson, as well as Griffin, Khalip, Wymer, and others — cite this demand, further solidifying the link between Jarman’s political and aesthetic choices in Blue and the Nixon exhibition in particular.
PART II: SPEAKING QUEER BODIES

In his article on Blue’s “queer archeology of sound,” Khalip wrote that AIDS summons us to “listen, hear, attend to it,” and that Blue is a testament to the fact that we have yet to “properly listen” to the virus and the communities it effects (100). We have yet to do this because AIDS is a visually overdetermined disease, an “epidemic of signification” (Treichler) that insists a PWA can be identified by the “look” of AIDS (a blatant untruth, given that many PWAs and HIV-positive people bear no visual signifiers of the virus and go about their daily lives undetected by the mythically-threatened “general public.” Blue asks us not only to listen to PWAs and listen to the virus but to ask, as Khalip concludes, “what might be the sounds of AIDS, after all?” (100).

Simon Garfield might respond that the sounds of AIDS, or at least the sounds of Jarman’s experience of AIDS, are in the “gripping and affirmative stuff” of Blue’s narration—Jarman’s hospital diary, his dreamy recollections, his philosophical meditations. Garfield wrote that Blue “sounds like death on screen” (266). And it does: memories and existential reflections are interwoven with descriptions of the unrelenting and often bureaucratic tedium of dying—drug trials, waiting room visits, the search for a vein—all bathed in a rich, sonic smear of a score that moves from dreamy and soothing, to jarring and dark, to a sort of ambient haze. But there is another sort of “death” that occurs in Blue: the death of cinematic convention. By structuring a verbal performance around a complex musical score and layering it upon the “monochrome image track” (Hallas, 225) of the IKB screen, Jarman inverts the “hegemony of image over sound” that
has historically shaped popular and critical reception of narrative and experimental cinema (Hallas, 25; see also Khalip, 77).

Without an image, the most direct access to corporeality in *Blue* is facilitated by its spoken script. Jarman’s physical self, or the impression of it, is conjured through the joint efforts of the narrators and the spectator. The former describes or suggests, the latter hears and imagines, and in the space between them, a suggestion or trace of Jarman’s body is manifested. These traces are mediated through the voice, the screen, and the spectator.

At one point in the narration, Jarman describes the mass deaths in his community of friends in a litany of symptoms, agonies, and cries—that go silent. “Voices slurred, and then were lost forever,” he says. Jarman seems to want to account for these “lost voices” himself, as the next line in the script is “my pen chased this story across the page.” Schwenger observes Jarman’s drive to write elsewhere in the script, just before he prays to be released from image. The narrator says:

Accustomed to believing in image, an absolute idea of value, his world had forgotten the command of essence: Thou Shalt Not Create Unto Thyself Any Graven Image, although you know the task is to fill the empty page.

Schwenger emphasizes the last line, noting that Jarman insists on the “page,” not the screen or canvas. “Of Jarman’s considerable talents, he has selected writing to demonstrate the tyranny of image,” he observes, yet still noting that here Jarman reminds us that “Thou Shalt Not” is also “You Must”; a command to fill the empty page (421). But, Jarman also seems to imply that his written words must be spoken—spoken, and then heard—and not read. (Reading, after all, is visual.) Hallas also quotes Schwenger,
surmising that “the injunction against image in this passage is paired with an implicit command to write” (225). In Blue, language not only facilitates the means by which Jarman asks the spectator to bear witness (or, as Hallas puts it, “to construct a testimonial address to an other”), but it also “serves as the form through which the witnessing body may be imagined” (225). Words, particularly spoken words, make bodies—Jarman’s body, the bodies of his friends, the spectators’ bodies—real and whole.

In terms of the spoken narration of Blue, Jarman calls his body, the bodies of people from his life, and those of fantasy characters he creates by speaking them into being. We see them and recognize them in our minds, with the IKB screen, as Garfield writes, working as a “canvas” for our vision (266). Jarman’s radical call for us to “see” his body and these other bodies through his words is, indeed, a request and an action that disrupts automatic connections to conventional, visual depictions of these people. Instead, we experience these bodies with own sensory perceptions, our own imaginations. “By liberating the speaking voice from its body through both visual and aural disembodiment, Blue produces the effect of corporeal implication in its spectator,” he writes. “…This visceral, mimetic component to the spectatorial experience of Blue generates a potential transformation in the dynamics of bearing witness to AIDS” (Hallas, 229).

Works of art that achieve what Jarman achieved with Blue utilize what Lorenz would call abstract drag. This mode not only cuts ties to conventional representations but opens space for queer embodiments to appear in their place. Queer embodiments shatter dichotomies, break norms, and exist in planes that can be liberated from heterosexist, sexist, and racist structures. Drag is, perhaps, the original queer embodiment. I will return
to the idea of Blue-in-drag later on, but here I will offer up all the queer embodiments I identified in Blue (other than the film itself, which was the first). These queer embodiments can be found in floral and natural imagery, which has a symbolic significance in art about AIDS beyond Blue; in Jarman’s conjuring of his own queer body, queerly, and his implication of the spectator’s body; and, finally, in his conjuring of queer characters both fictional and remembered.

**Flower (and Fruit) “Bodies”**

Last winter, I visited the controversial *Art AIDS America* exhibition at the Tacoma Art Museum in Washington State. While this exhibition was rightly criticized for its white-washed distortion of the racial demographics of AIDS, I was very moved by individual pieces from the show. One of those pieces was Robert Sherer’s “Sweet Williams,” an illustration so delicate and innocent it could appear in an old-fashioned children’s book. It shows a pair of hands clipping some Sweet William flowers with a knife, painted in sepia-toned lines—and painted with, the description noted, HIV-negative and HIV-positive blood. According to the rest of the description, Sherer was inspired by a visit to his grandmother’s home in the late 1980s. She asked him to go into her garden and cut some of the flowers for a bouquet, adding, “Now, honey, cut down the most beautiful ones first.” Sherer elaborated on this experience later, speaking with WABE reporter Gabbie Watts after the exhibition moved to Kennesaw, GA:
I felt like the grim reaper at the time because several of my friends were dying of AIDS in Atlanta, who had names like Bill, Billy and William…It was hard on me. I remember breaking down when I was in her yard. (Watts)

Sherer felt the terrible weight of selecting “the most beautiful ones first”—just like the virus “cut down” his young, lively, healthy, beautiful friends. In “Sweet Williams,” Sherer utilizes abstract drag to express the heartbreakingly literal feeling he had in his grandmother’s garden. While his use of real human blood actually challenges the “abstract” part, drawing very concrete connections to real HIV-negative and HIV-positive bodies, the painted flowers—the Williams—stand in for the bodies of Sherer’s sweet, beautiful friends, “cut down” too soon by AIDS. The disembodied hands in the painting descend from on high to make the cuts; they could be Sherer’s, the Grim Reaper’s, God’s.

This is a terribly poignant story by itself, but its significance extends beyond Sherer and his grandmother’s garden. In fact, the deep emotional resonance that the flowers inspired in Sherer, and his subsequent use of them in his art, is part of a frequent tendency toward flower imagery in AIDS discourse, particularly literature. As Amy Harris argues, the fecundity and mortality of the flower have powerful symbolic implications for the HIV-positive body in literature and other art. Harris traces the roots of this link between flowers and HIV/AIDS in literature to earlier writings about other pathologies, beginning in ancient Greece and reaching to the nineteenth century. Harris references Jarman’s memoir Modern Nature to underscore a point about floral contagion metaphors in nineteenth century cultural discourse:
Derek Jarman notes the close correlation between flowers in Modernist and contemporary literary traditions, characterizing his ‘obsession with flowers’ as ‘glossy, exotic, fin de siecle.’ Moreover, Jarman cuts the flower from the natural world and fastens it to an imagery lapel in order to establish a second parallel of flowers to modern gay culture: ‘Was the pansy pinned to us, its velvety nineteenth century showiness the texture of Oscar’s flamboyant and floppy clothes?’ Though Jarman cites the pansy specifically, his observation also alludes to the carnation that Oscar Wilde, lover of all things artificial, wore. The carnation, its stem dipped in ink to absorb the pigment, represented unnaturalness, both in human achievement (artistic or scientific) and in conventional moralistic views of human sexuality. (Harris, NP)

This is her only mention of Jarman. Harris turns to the poetry of Paul Monette, Silverlake Life, and works by several other poets and essayists to demonstrate how frequently and powerfully flower imagery occurs in art about AIDS, from the likening of the hand of a PWA to a flower; several instances of KS legions “blooming” on the skin, and a similar likening of the HIV-infected body in decline as “a flower in full, frightening bloom”; and many ambient references to cut flowers standing by in “unnatural” aestheticized states (floating in bowls, pinned to lapels, sitting on hospital window sills, laid atop graves). “As a signifier of natural disorder, the flower’s organic nature and its implication of fecundity and survival wax most ironic in AIDS literature,” Harris concludes. In these texts, “fertility turns malignant” and threatens to destroy linear logic and established classifications. AIDS literature, she writes, refuses the aestheticization and apparent innocuousness of the flower, and instead “marks the body as a work of
artifice, separated from the natural order, even while transforming the body into a flower.”

In light of Harris’s observations, some the poetic imagery in Blue’s narration comes into clearer focus. But first we should remember that flowers and gardens had a tremendous and well-documented personal significance for Jarman well before AIDS. “Flowers sparkled in my childhood as they do in a medieval manuscript,” he wrote (Jarman, 1996, 11). He remembers that his parents gave him a book called Beautiful Flowers and How to Grow Them when he was a very young child, and that his passion for gardens and gardening grew from there. Famously, he cultivated a thriving garden at Prospect Cottage in Dungeness from 1986 until his death in 1994, a venture lovingly documented in Derek Jarman’s Garden. But Derek Jarman’s Garden is, even more significantly, about that era of Jarman’s life—1986 until his death—and his dogged dedication to the wild beauty and life of his garden. In the book’s preface, Keith Collins writes that as Jarman’s health deteriorated the garden acquired new meaning, with the plants first “struggling against biting winds and Death Valley sun [and merging] with Derek’s struggle with illness, and then contrast[ing] with it, as the flowers blossomed while Derek faded.” Here, we can recognize Harris’s observations in action: flowers take on powerful symbolic significance in the lives and the writings of PWAs and those close to them.

Delphiniums appear twice in Blue. The first instance is a descriptor in an early dreamy sequence of the film, in which Jarman is mentally transported from a hospital—his doctor shines a “terrible blinding light” into his eyes, causing Jarman to see “blue flashes”—to the fantastical escape of a warm, blue-hazed, bucolic paradise. We hear a
few easy, slow notes on a guitar, and some sparkling chimes. Jarman describes lying in a
field, on a lazy day, listening to a bluebottle buzzing nearby and watching a “sky-blue
butterfly” sway on a cornflower. “Blue of my heart, blue of my dreams, slow blue love of
delphinium days,” he intones, almost a whisper. This description evokes a blue-tinted
Eden, a haven far from the earthly despair of life and death, and also calls to the final
scene—Higginson’s “queer h(e)aven” in the sea. In that scene, Jarman refers to the
h(e)aven as a “submarine garden,” where the Lost Boys “sleep forever,” locked in a
sacred, eternal embrace. In these two scenes, at the beginning and end of the film
respectively, Jarman simultaneously escapes and embraces death amid flourishing natural
imagery. Flowers, in the blue-haze field and in the submarine garden, signify the success
of his escape.

The delphinium’s second and final appearance comes in the last line of the film,
when Jarman says, “I place a delphinium, Blue, upon your grave.” It is an ambiguous
reference. In capitalizing Blue, the printed text of the narration implies that Jarman is
speaking to Blue the Boy, who has died. But hearing this line spoken is not so clear-cut.
It’s possible that the speaker is placing a blue delphinium—“a delphinium, blue”—upon
a grave. But whose grave? Furthermore, who, in fact, is “I”? (This question is also voiced
by Griffin (20)). Here, the speaker could be Jarman, referring to Blue’s grave, or it could
be Jarman referring to someone else’s grave, perhaps a friend’s, or even the spectator’s
(“your”s!). It is also possible that the speaker could be someone else, in the future,
returning to Jarman’s grave and placing the delphinium there. Jarman knew he was dying
as he made Blue, and he told Simon Garfield (who said that Blue feels like “an epitaph”)

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that it would be his last film. The delphinium becomes a marker of the ambiguity of the text.

In a description that Sherer would parallel two decades later, Jarman notes that while some of his friends died dramatically, “others faded like flowers cut by the scythe of the Blue Bearded Reaper, parched as the waters of life receded.” Elsewhere, Jarman occasionally characterizes illness as a death-bringing “frost” felling his and his friends’ “flower bodies”: the virus catches them “like a blue frost,” and he talks about his own mind being “frosted” with medication, iced over, with snowflakes “whiting out” his memory in the “teeth chattering” cold.

But Jarman also speaks of illness and death by frost’s opposite extreme—withering, sun-blasted heat. In one strange scene, Jarman shifts the narrative back to the journey of the Blue-Eyed Boy, who is fighting a foe, the slit-eyed “Yellowbelly,” who appears to be some kind of wasp. Yellowbelly is “diseased” with “fetid breath” and a “jaundiced kiss.” He attacks Blue next to a field of similarly “jaundiced corn,” crawling over “Eve’s rotting apple” to sting Blue in the mouth. But most significantly, in this hostile, yellow-tinted territory, death, disease, and the presence of evil are conveyed by shriveled, crispy sunflowers, which “wilt in the empty pot, bone dry, skeletal, the black seeds picked into the staring face of a Halloween pumpkin.” The “skeletal” sunflowers, with their frightening unnatural grins, watch the fight like a gang of the undead. The natural imagery in this scene—blistering yellow, parched, and threatening—is contrasted harshly with the imagery in Jarman’s havens, where cornflowers, delphiniums, and undersea flora thrive in dreamy, watery blue light.
The presence of “Eve’s rotting apple” indicates that this dried-up, poisonous place was once an Eden, suggesting that something terrible occurred there; something that might, therefore, threaten the security of Jarman’s safe, lovely h(e)avens. It also may be a further indication of Jarman’s “postlapsarian” sickness and terrible knowledge—a companion to the frightening, wilted sunflowers. (In engaging with an Edenic metaphor, I understand that I am stepping into somewhat dangerous territory: evoking Eden means speaking in terms of innocence, transgression, and consequence, and, to be clear, I do not want to perpetuate any tired and damaging myths about who is “innocent” and who is “guilty” when it comes to AIDS. When I speak of innocence, I mean innocence of the existence of AIDS, and not the “innocence” of someone who yet to “transgress.”)

Removed from Yellowbelly’s fetid presence, the reference to Eve’s “rotting apple” made me think of the “fruit bodies” of Zoe Leonard’s Strange Fruit, Lorenz’s first example of abstract drag. Eve’s apple and Leonard’s rinds are not flowers, but they are organic earthly produce all the same, and together they highlight the philosophical and emotional resonances between Blue, Strange Fruit, and Sherer’s and Harris’s observance of the heavy symbolic weight of flowers. While Eve’s apple in Blue is actively threatening, Leonard’s shriveled rinds are mostly just sad; but they do similarly suggest that an external force (perhaps something malevolent, but possibly just time) has befallen them. More importantly, though, the presence of the rinds, with their wires and stitches, signifies that a different external force (i.e., a person) has tried to preserve them. Strange Fruit “not only refers to the destruction and vulnerability for destruction of the fruit bodies, which creates a connection to human bodies,” Lorenz writes, “but also the attempt, as careful and loving as it is perhaps futile and utterly insufficient, to maintain
and support” (134) them. We might observe poetic parallels here in caring for dying friends, suturing together old fruit rinds, and in enjoying, and cultivating, a wild and flourishing garden at the end of one’s own life.

**Jarman’s Body**

Jarman himself contributes to the narration only briefly, with the bulk of the task divided between the actors Nigel Terry, John Quentin, and Tilda Swinton, all three of whom are familiar players in Jarman’s films (Hallas, 228). There is no apparent logic to which narrator speaks which part, and the shifts between them are unmarked; they do not overlap or engage in any kind of discernible dialogue with one another. (Given this, for the sake of clarity, I will continue to refer to Jarman himself as the narrator; it is clear enough that the words and experience are his own.) Hallas writes that these shifts in narrator, and the corresponding shifts in the script’s emotional tone—despair, anger, sadness, humor, acceptance—reflect the “experience of radical discontinuity and…unpredictability” of living with AIDS, quoting from Blue, “The worst of this illness is the uncertainty. I’ve played this scenario back and forth each hour of the day for the last six years” (Hallas, 227).

Likewise, the contrast between the inescapably physiological realities of having AIDS and the intense desire to escape them is apparent in the spoken script. Higginson observes a contradiction at work in Blue “between the here-and-now material demands of Jarman’s activist commitment to, for instance, bettering AIDS treatment options on the one hand, and, on the other, the escapist dimensions of his…vision” (86). She is writing
of his political commitments here, but her observation also applies to Jarman’s
descriptions of his day-to-day experience of illness, such as these:

I have lost the sight on the periphery of my right eye.
I hold out my hands before me and slowly part them. At a certain moment they
disappear out of the corner of my eyes. This is how I used to see. Now if I repeat
the motion this is all I see.

and

My sight seems to have closed in. The hospital is even quieter this morning.
Hushed. I have a sinking feeling in my stomach. I feel defeated. My mind bright as
a button but my body falling apart — a naked light bulb in a dark and ruined room.

and

My skins sits on me like the shirt of Nessus. My face irritates, as do my back and
legs at night. I toss and turn, scratching, unable to sleep. I get up, turn on the light.
Stagger to the bathroom. If I become so tired, maybe I'll sleep…

In these descriptions, we can both visualize Jarman’s body and empathize with his
desire to escape it, which he attempts by conjuring dreamy, romantic visions. Language is
the means and the mediator. “Blue negotiates, and essentially stages a dialogue between,
the material realities of AIDS and a desire to escape the same,” Higginson writes (80).

Yet, Jarman knows he “shall not win the battle against the virus, in spite of
slogans like ‘living with AIDS,’” he says, after describing his diminishing field of vision.
He is critical of this attempt to respond to AIDS, going on to voice his criticism that “the virus was appropriated by the well, so we have to live with AIDS while they spread the quilt for the moths of Ithaca across the wine dark sea. Awareness is heightened by this, but something else is lost. A sense of reality drowned in theatre.” Jarman makes an implicit distinction between the “theater” of the rituals of the AIDS Quilt and the performance of Blue, which Vallorani expands on, writing that Jarman “[removes] the body and [anticipates] an act of mourning that will take full shape after his own death” (90). This “act” of mourning is really a series of acts, beginning with Jarman’s creation and performance of the film, the spectators’ absorption of it, and their continued remembrance and honor of Jarman, and others who have died of AIDS.

Lifting a quote from Blue, Vallorani writes that the film “offers no boundaries or solutions” to what the “image” of a PWA is or should be, instead granting the possibility of “solidarity and sharing, through the many rites of commemoration and mourning” (90). I would argue that Blue’s offering of solidarity and sharing is not a “possibility” but instead a demand, one that includes but also exceeds Vallorani’s emphasis on mourning. In Blue, Jarman collapses the boundary between not just “the PWA” and “the expected image of a PWA,” but between himself and the spectator. He says that the “sense of reality drowned in theatre” is an instance of people “thinking blind, becoming blind” in their public responses to AIDS. But in Blue, he shifts this from a criticism to an ethical demand.

The “blind” IKB screen parallels Jarman’s sightlessness (Hallas writes that the

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4 Jarman voices further ambivalence about the AIDS Quilt in Derek Jarman’s Garden: “I could see it was an emotional work, it got the heartstrings. But when the panels were unveiled a truly awful ceremony took place in which a group of what looked like refrigerated karate experts, all dressed in white, turned and chanted some mumbo jumbo — horrible, quasi-religious, false. I shall haunt anyone who ever makes a panel for me” (91).
screen presents itself as “either pure surface or depthless void” (226), inviting the spectator into one aspect of Jarman’s own embodied experience. Hallas calls this a “corporeal implication,” a phenomenon that marks the potential for a transformation in the dynamics of bearing witness to AIDS. “In foreclosing my ability to imagine the body of the person with AIDS ‘out there,’ I come to witness the witness [Jarman, in this case] through my very own body,” Hallas writes. “The body of the other is implicated in my own” (229). He distinguishes this “embodied spectatorship” as different from other forms of cinematic identification, as Blue’s unique optical, acoustic, and spatial qualities prevent the spectator from “pinning down the other with [her] eyes” or forgetting her own embodiment (230).

Hallas’s description of his viewing experience of Blue perfectly encapsulates the phenomena of spectatorship and witnessing that takes places:

In the blue light in which Jarman’s body, the witness’s body, remained unfigured, the spectator’s body, my own body, now became visible as the reflected light of the film touched it. In the blue aura around me I had begun to notice my own seated body (as well as the bodies of other viewers nearby). Such diffusion of light threatened to absorb the distance between spectator and screen, preventing my very ability to grasp precisely the object of my visual perception. Was I looking at a screen or merely, and incredibly, at light? … This ambiguity snagged my visual perception in that impossible gap between surface and depth. If…I was looking at light, I was looking at both nothing and everything. It was thus my own body that emerged as the surest presence to be sense by my own visual perception. I could
see myself engaged in the act of seeing at the same time that I felt myself losing control of it. (231)

This dissolved boundary between Jarman and his spectators has radical political and ethical implications amidst the spectacle of AIDS and the media’s pathological gaze upon PWAs. *Blue’s* reversal of visual attention from the body with AIDS back to the spectator, and implication that the boundary between them has collapsed, boldly challenges the prevailing cultural hysteria that HIV-positive bodies be kept at a “safe distance” (Hallas, 230) from the “general public.”

In *Queer Art: A Freak Theory*, Lorenz does not appear to be in direct conversation with Hallas, but his theory of “corporeal implication” is a close associate of abstract drag. Abstract drag is in fact built upon this quietly radical “implication,” a truth underscored by the fact that Hallas supports his argument by discussing *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA)*—Lorenz’s most extensive example of abstract drag.

**Fictional Bodies**

The most straightforward (and, yet, the most confounding) evocation of spoken queer embodiments appears in a deviation from the rest of the script: the “clamoring, perverse choir” (Khalip, 96) that mockingly sings of a number of sexual identities and behaviors. “Deviation” is the appropriate term to use, as this moment is a defiant, joyful affirmation of queerness and of Jarman’s refusal to conform to rigid definitions of sexuality. It also can be read as another instance of *Blue’s* own multiplicity and resistance to being categorized as any single kind of medium. A dramatic departure both
acoustically and narratively from the rest of the film, it is part musical number, part drunken football chant:

I am a mannish
Muff diving
Size queen
With bad attitude
An arse licking
Psychofag
Molested the flies of privacy
Balling lesbian boys
A perverted heterodemon
Crossing purpose with death

I am a cock sucking
Straight acting
Lesbian man
With ball crushing bad manners
Laddish nymphomaniac politics
Spunky sexist desires
of incestuous inversion and
Incorrect terminology
I am a Not Gay
Lawrence links this chant to Jarman’s descriptions of the characters that populate the waiting rooms he must spend interminable hours in. Jarman, Lawrence writes, “refuses to dwell on themes such as sexuality, race, and the specifics of illness, pursuing a determined vagueness that counters mainstream attempts to fix and render transparent the identity of the person with AIDS” (254). The chant, he goes on, further “confounds the categorizers,” and in fact may be said to queer Jarman’s own queerness (254). As Wymer points out, Jarman was never comfortable with the label ‘gay,’ regarding it “too stable and self-satisfied, too concerned to present a positive image. He preferred the more fluid and mobile term ‘queer’” (3). Fittingly, the contradictory characters that Jarman conjures here refuse and confuse the spectator’s understanding of sexual identities (with a wink).

This “queer embrace of polymorphous perversity” (Hallas, 228) is exemplary not only of Jarman’s queerness, but the queerness of Blue. Hallas writes that this portion of the script wittily acknowledges the “dispersed subjectivity” of Blue, mirroring the tension between the testimonial subjectivity of its spoken script and the differentiation between the four narrators who perform it (228).

The character Blue is slightly more accessible on the surface, but his form, origin, and significance are complex and ambiguous. Griffin, Higginson, and Lawrence read Blue as a queer character, and Lawrence links him to Jarman himself. “The idea of the blue screen provided Jarman with an answer to one of his greatest problems: how to make an autobiographical film about AIDS without filming himself,” Lawrence writes (249). As Jarman explains in At Your Own Risk, writing openly about his sexuality—writing “‘out’”—was his tactic for filling in the cultural, literary, and historical “blanks”
where gay people live, have sex, and love (or, rather, how he lived, had sex, and loved—he “[put] the I rather than the ‘they’…to show that I wasn’t talking of others”). He further explains, “the subtext of my films have been the books, putting myself back in the picture” (30). In Blue, as Lawrence writes, Jarman “grafts his autobiographical writing onto the celluloid” (250).

Lawrence argues that Blue is a proxy for Jarman, noting that Jarman had pointed out that “a boy” appears in all of his films, “a witness and a survivor” whom “everyone identifies with.” For Lawrence, the significance of Blue is apparent in his appearance in the first line of the film, with which he shares a name. Blue the character is therefore the linking metaphor between Jarman, the importance of gay autobiography, and Klein’s theory of color, which insisted on bestowing color with individuality, character, and personality (250). The “boy-as-witness” symbol is another link to Klein, who Lawrence notes described his paintings as silent witnesses to “‘the very essence of movement and life in freedom that is the flame of poetry during the poetic moment” (qtd., 250). In this quote, we find the origin of Blue’s later travels to the faraway labyrinth, where he observes the “archeology of sound” in action, watching the “poetry of fire” flame and burn.

Blue begins:

You say to the boy open your eyes
When he opens his eyes and sees the light
You make him cry out. Saying
O Blue come forth
O Blue arise
O Blue ascend
O Blue come in

Griffin notes the ambiguity of this address (which parallels the same ambiguity in the final line of the film), writing that the “you” could be Jarman, an other, or an unknown viewer. “Quite what or who is being evoked remains unclear,” she writes. However,

The viewer is activated through the address which might also be directed at her or him. This demand for engagement constitutes part of Jarman’s militancy and is quite unlike the construction of the viewer’s position in many other films on AIDS which, in their quasi-documentary, realist style foster passivity and distantiatation in the viewer. (20)

Conversely, Higginson offers the assumption that “you” is Jarman and “the boy” is his lover, noting that she was struck by the “queer erotics” of the film’s opening lines. “The ‘light,’ which engenders a ‘crying out,’ is orgasmic, while the ‘arising,’ ‘ascending,’ and ‘coming in,’ are phallic and penetrative,” she writes (8). (Still, even as she makes this assumption, she acknowledges the ambiguity of the relationship, wondering whether the film’s opening is a poetic rendering of the scene which immediately follows it, in which Jarman’s optometrist shines “a terrible blinding light” in his eyes—thus casting Jarman as the “boy,” an infantilized patient. (80.) I won’t as confidently assume that this scene is an erotic one, since I do not read Blue as sexual or
sexualized elsewhere in the film. I prefer Lawrence’s analysis, which places a greater emphasis on Blue’s representation of a “gay genealogy” that is part of Jarman’s “attempt to remedy the terrifying historical chasm experienced in his childhood” (250). Given Jarman’s commitment to gay autobiography and “writing out,” I do think we can assume that Blue is gay and certainly queer — a queer hero, Jarman’s proxy for sight, beginning with his command to “open your eyes” and “see the light.” Jarman, unable to do this himself, bestows Blue with the role of witness.

Despite Jarman’s assertion that his “boy” is always a witness and a survivor, the most direct reading of the text indicates that Blue has died by the end of the film. Our last encounter with Blue is in the parched, rotting, jaundice-yellow Eden, where he is in a fight with the evil, stinking wasp, Yellowbelly. Though Jarman says at the end of that scene that “Blue transformed into an insectocutor, his Blue aura frying the foes,” it is unclear whether Blue makes it out alive. And then recall the final line, “I place a delphinium, Blue, upon your grave.” Then again, as Griffin asks of this line, “Who is being mourned here?” It is unclear; all that is certain is that there has been a great loss. Blue mourns “many losses,” Griffin writes, “of which eyesight is just one” (20-21).

While Jarman refers to the specific, real, and deeply personal losses of his friends throughout Blue, in the final scene of the film he mourns the losses from AIDS by conjuring “an eternal queer sanctuary on the seabed” (Higginson, 79). Higginson theorizes this scene is both an elegy and a prophesy — Jarman’s attempt “to mitigate unassuageable loss by appropriating the ancient Christian paradigm of blindness as spiritual insight to render himself capable of augering a ‘queer h(e)aven’ for himself and
his beloved ‘Lost Boys’” (79). Like Higginson, I will quote the text of this lyrical scene in its entirety:

Pearl fishers
In azure seas
Deep waters
Washing the isle of the dead
In coral harbours
Amphora
Spill
Gold
Across the still seabed
We lie there
Fanned by the billowing
Sails of forgotten ships
Tossed by the mournful winds
Of the deep
Lost Boys
Sleep forever
In a dear embrace
Salt lips touching
In submarine gardens
Cool marble fingers
Touch an antique smile
Shell sounds
Whisper
Deep love drifting on the tide forever
The smell of him
Dead good looking
In beauty's summer
His blue jeans
Around his ankles
Bliss in my ghostly eye
Kiss me
On the lips
On the eyes
Our name will be forgotten
In time
No one will remember our work
Our life will pass like the traces of a cloud
And be scattered like
Mist that is chased by the
Rays of the sun
For our time is the passing of a shadow
And our lives will run like
Sparks through the stubble.
I place a delphinium, Blue, upon your grave.

It is a extraordinarily poignant and beautifully described scene. Through the narration, we experience “ardent images of queer desire in an ethereal and timeless ocean setting” (Higginson, 82). Jarman’s “Lost Boys,” who we understand as his dear community of friends and lovers lost to AIDS, may have lost their lives and their corporeal forms, but Jarman conjures and reanimates them here with his voice and “vision.” He offers them new forms, safe and beautiful and loving forms, in a “magical-marginal zone for Jarman’s chosen few” (Moor, 63).

Higginson, Moor, and others characterize this scene as a prophesy or a fantasy; I would also note that it aches with memory, particularly the second half.

**Remembered Bodies**

Some of these queer corporeal traces occur in hazy, dreamy spaces where the line between memory and fantasy is blurred. For instance, after a hard and restless wait for sleep, Jarman describes a dream, tinged with the remembrance of his youth and his grandmother, Moselle:

Films chase through my mind. Once in a while I dream a dream as magnificent as the Taj Mahal. I cross southern India with a young spirit guide - India, the land of my dreaming childhood. The souvenirs in Moselle’s peach and grey living room. Granny called Moselle, called 'Girly', called May. An orphan who lost her name, which was Ruben. Jade, monkeys, ivory miniatures, mah-jongg. The winds and
bamboos of China.

Here, we have the impression of travel over great distances contrasted with cozy domesticity. More contrasts and questions: the familiarity of Moselle and her living her room; the mystery of the orphan Ruben. We wonder if Jarman’s “young spirit guide” is himself a spirit guiding Jarman across southern India or if the journey itself is a spiritual one, a journey inward. We have the contrast of concrete “things”—Moselle’s souvenirs, jade, monkeys, ivory—and the less tangible: dreams, spirits, winds.

But other memories are straightforward. In a vivid evocation of queer physicality—and female queer physicality, an extreme rarity for Jarman—Jarman briefly but significantly shares his memory of a woman he knew as a teenager who made a distinct impression upon him. Over the faded jangle of 1950s pop, Jarman recalls “dear Miss Punch…the first out dyke I ever met,” a seventy-year-old gardener (with “time to spare” in January) he worked with during his adolescent winters at the National Institute for the Blind “on their Christmas appeal for radios.” Miss Punch “looked like Edith Piaf, a sparrow, and wore a cock-eyed beret at a saucy angle,” he tells us. We hear the growl of her motorcycle, which she drove to work each day in leathers. Through this description and the accompanying soundtrack, Jarman gives us the impression of a highly capable, independent woman with a clear sense of identity expressed through her clothes, her manner, and her work. Clearly, the young Jarman recognized a kinship with Miss Punch in her queerness, and perhaps also in her profession as a gardener. “Closeted and frightened by my sexuality, she was my hope,” he says.
The “Miss Punch” scene is a diversion from the other “memory” pieces of the narrative, (and indeed another diversion from the rest of the film in both tone and effect). He leaves Miss Punch with “hope” for a life as an openly queer person, but the other memories Jarman recounts are weighted by knowledge of AIDS, even (or especially) the memories of a time before the onset of the epidemic. Roughly halfway through the film, the soundtrack shifts rather abruptly from the dreary ambient noises of a hospital to ethereal electronic music. It swells and swirls into a disco beat, evoking flashing lights and moving bodies on a dance floor. It sounds like the seventies, like youth and sex and freedom; it actually sounds like a memory, somehow—haunting, haunted, a little hazy. But underneath the beat and trills is an eerie, oscillating, electronic wail, and a dark low hum: the sound of retrospection tainted by the terrible knowledge of what followed this short period of fun and relative freedom. Jarman speaks:

Impatient youths of the sun
Burning with many colors
Flick combs through hair
In bathroom mirrors
 Fucking with fusion and fashion
Dance in the beams of emerald lasers
Mating on suburban duvets
Cum splattered nuclear breeders
What a time that was.
These people, these impatient youths of the sun, are conjured not through descriptions of their appearance, but through an evocative disco sound and through descriptions of their behaviors—preening, dancing, fucking. But we don’t just know what they did; we understand what happened to them, which, like the disco dance floor beat, is conveyed through noise, not language. After “dance in the beams of emerald lasers,” a dark and distorted electronic rumbling tears through the disco beat, a sonic rip, a warning, before the beat resumes. The final line is spoken with wonder and even with surprise, as if he can’t quite fathom that this time occurred in the same life he lives now.

Other memories, which haunt Jarman, are more immediate. He describes walking along a stormy beach and hearing the voices of friends who have died of AIDS in the roar of the wind and sea. “My heart’s memory turns to you,” he says, and then whispers their names: “David. Howard. Graham. Terry. Paul….” The names are repeated again and again, an incantation that conjures the corporeal trace of these men alongside Jarman himself. His friends are also made present in descriptions of their deaths, which are recounted in a heartbreaking litany: there was David, who died panicked and exhausted after running home from the train station; Terry “[mumbling] incoherently into his incontinent tears”; others, unnamed, who, as we recall, “faded like flowers cut by the scythe of the Blue Bearded Reaper,” and finally, devastatingly, Howard, who “turned slowly to stone, petrified day by day, his mind imprisoned in a concrete fortress until all we could hear were his groans on the telephone circling the globe.” Jarman addresses this same Howard, Howard Bruckner, in At Your Own Risk: “Before you died, I rang you in NYC, you had run out of words and your groans circled the world” (119) — another instance of life and death manifesting, vividly, through mediated sound.
He also describes the lead-up to these deaths, accompanied by a dark, growling audio track of distorted thumping beats that swell and fade. Here, Jarman could be speaking specifically of his friends (of which he has none “who are not dead or dying”), but he could also be referring to the accelerating spread of the epidemic among gay men at large:

The virus rages fierce. I have no friends now who are not dead or dying. Like a blue frost it caught them: At work, at the cinema, on marches and beaches. In churches on their knees, running, flying, silent or shouting protest.

It started with sweats in the night and swollen glands. Then the black cancer spread across their faces. As they fought for breath, TB and pneumonia hammered their lungs, and toxo at the brain. Reflexes scrambled. Sweat poured through hair matter like lianas in the tropical forest. Voices slurred, and then were lost forever.
PART III: BLUE IN DRAG

If you transgress Heterosoc, you have to reinvent it.
- Derek Jarman, At Your Own Risk (31)

In *Queer Art: A Freak Theory*, Lorenz characterizes drag as “a set of artistic methods that produce a distance to norms and subjection [which] deeply challenges the foundations of epistemology, conceptions of the self, [and] theories of the body, as well as art theory” (35). In the context of queer art theory, drag “may refer to the productive connections of natural and artificial, animate and inanimate...[to] all that which tends more to produce connections to others and other things than to represent them” (21). Drag, she argues, is a way to understand and reconstruct how norms produce genders, sexualities, and identities, as well as a way to critique and produce distance from these same norms. This is true of conventional performances of drag (i.e., queens and kings), but Lorenz’s aim is to show how artists use drag methods in their work. She distinguishes between three types: radical drag, which breaks binary dichotomies—man/woman, able/non-able—by proposing images that transcend them; transtemporal drag, which intervenes in existing concepts of time; and, finally, abstract drag, which produces “visualizations of bodies that show no human body at all and instead uses objects, situations, or traces to refer to bodies” (23). This mode, abstract drag, is a three-step production: it “cuts ties” to conventional representations of bodies, makes space for queer embodiments to appear in their place, and, therefore, suggests new ties to bodies outside the “norm” (133). While it may be evident that *Blue* qualifies, on several levels, as a production of abstract drag, an understanding of why, and how, is deepened by exploring Lorenz’s examples of this mode of artistic production.
Works produced in response to HIV/AIDS use abstract drag with some frequency for two reasons. The first is to avoid the landmines of stigma and overdetermination so easily activated by showing images of a person with AIDS, and the second is because “referring” to a body, without images of that body present, is a powerful way to evoke memory, absence, and loss. To illustrate her concept of abstract drag, Lorenz discusses two installation pieces by artists whose biographies supply the context that images of human bodies in their work do not: Strange Fruit by Zoe Leonard, and Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA) by Félix González-Torres.

Leonard’s piece is comprised by many empty rinds and peels—oranges, lemons, grapefruit, bananas—fruit “bodies”—that have been visibly stitched back together. Lorenz observes that these “taxidermied specimens” seem as though they slipped quietly, unscathed, into death and decay, though they “clearly bear the traces of being sliced open and emptied out, of the time of drying and decaying as well as being patched up again. They are fruits, and at the same time they are no longer fruits, for the fruit pulp is missing” (132). Lorenz writes that Leonard, who was also an AIDS activist and member of ACT UP, produced Strange Fruit between the years 1992 and 1997, and told interviewer Anna Blume that the piece was about “relationships and emotions” which “supplemented the actions of ACT UP, which were often necessarily focused outward and on the surface, with another means of engagement: one that takes up the question of loss” (133). In the same interview, Leonard also said producing the work was a way to process the loss of her friend, David Wojnarowicz. It isn’t incidental that Strange Fruit also references a sculpture of Wojnarowicz’s, in which he cut a loaf of bread in half and sewed it back together with blood-red thread (133).
The title is, of course, a reference to the Billie Holiday song about the lynchings of black Americans in the southern US (“Southern trees bear a strange fruit / Blood on leaves and blood at the root / Black body swinging in the Southern breeze / Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees”). In appropriating the title, Leonard suggests “spectators must figure out the connections between racism and homophobia, and draw attention to the bodies that carry the traces of the respective violations,” Lorenz writes. “The title of the work thus suggests that what there is to be seen can be seen as the absences of human bodies” (134).

This sense of the presence of absence is perhaps the most immediately powerful effect of abstract drag. Félix González-Torres used it often in his minimalist, quietly powerful installations: the glowing, and eventually burned out, light bulbs of Untitled (Rossmore), Untitled (For New York) and Untitled (North); the two ticking clocks, inevitably out of sync, of Untitled (Perfect Lovers); the impressions on the pillows of an empty, unmade bed in his most famous photograph (called Untitled), which was displayed on a billboard in Manhattan. But to best illustrate González-Torres’s use of abstract drag, Lorenz chooses to discuss Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA), a 1991 installation comprised of 175 pounds of hard candies, individually wrapped in brightly colored cellophane and piled in the gallery corner.

Lorenz characterizes this work (along with similar installations by González-Torres from the same era) as “embodiment without bodies” (136). Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA) makes no attempt to represent bodies visually, offers no overt political positioning, and is not immediately recognizable as a work that engages with contemporary artistic practices of contextualizing debates of sexuality and gender (136).
González-Torres abstracts the point of visualization, leaving only the clues of his biography and the linguistic sign in the title to help viewers construct meaning.

González-Torres’s partner, Ross Laycock, died of AIDS in 1991. González-Torres, who died of AIDS himself five years later, provided careful instructions for galleries showing the installation: visitors should be encouraged to take and eat the candies, but the gallery must continually replenish the mound and try to maintain it at an ideal weight of 175 pounds, which corresponds to Ross’s weight (137). This interactivity is a sort of communion, a transformative exchange between artist and viewer through the artwork. Rather than taking a subjective, voyeuristic position and approximating “empathy” for the person shown in the portrait, as with Nixon-and-Solomon-style portraiture of people with AIDS, viewers are instead asked to participate in the ethical and political work the artist is trying to do. Lorenz characterizes this as “entanglement” (17)—the state the spectator finds herself in as the work challenges her to participate in denormalizing practices.

“By forgoing any visualization of Ross, gay men, or people with HIV/AIDS, the work does not allow us…to ask, for example, if the body of a person named Ross showed traces of illness, if he seemed desperate or relaxed, or if he was an attractive, loving partner to the artist,” Lorenz writes. Instead, the work proposes a “different topography,” one that collapses the conventional syntax of language and visual signs (138).

Though she never mentions Jarman, Lorenz could clearly make a similar argument about *Blue*.

She goes on:
I would claim that staging such a collapse of syntax in this installation as ‘abstract drag’ makes it possible to produce a distance that interrupts the performative repetition of social norms. Before possibly bestowing meaning again, (conventional) meanings are first withdrawn. (138)

Earlier, discussing Sherer’s *Sweet Williams*, I highlighted the poetic and emotional resonance between that work, *Blue* and *Strange Fruit*, but there is also a resonance between *Blue* and *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA)*. Hallas observes this resonance, citing the similar “witnessing dynamics” of *Blue* and González-Torres’s AIDS-themed installations. Like *Blue*, Hallas writes, González-Torres’s work “foregrounds corporeality just as it displaces the visual figuration of the body onto metaphor and trace.” The similar “witnessing dynamics” of Jarman’s and González-Torres’s work make certain ethical and participatory demands of audience members and gallery visitors. In reference to *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in LA)*, Hallas characterizes the implicit charge of these witnessing dynamics as a call to participate in acts of “dismemberment and communion that blur the distinction between the body of the artwork and the beholder” (230). *Blue* makes similar demands of spectators. The transformative “corporeal implication” Hallas describes at work in González-Torres’s work and in *Blue* is fundamental to Lorenz’s conception of abstract drag.

*Blue* achieves the three steps of abstract drag that Lorenz outlined: first, the film dramatically cuts ties to representations of conventional bodies by denying visualization of any kind of body; second, this cutting of ties opens up a transformative space where queer embodiments—the film itself, the “embodied spectatorship” of the viewer, the bodies conjured by Jarman’s narration—appear in place of conventional representations;
and, finally, suggests “ties to new bodies” (133). The spatiality of abstract drag is key: Lorenz argues that these abstract visualizations of bodies carve out a gap, a distance, in the spectator’s mind, and it is in that space where she can form new connections to these or other bodies, which, in the case of art about AIDS, are outside the norm.

This is the kind of psycho-political labor of classic drag performance. In her foundational work *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler describes the “perpetual displacement” of the meaning of a drag production as constituting a “fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization” (188). When Lorenz writes of “ties to new bodies” and entanglement,” this is what she means. The power of drag performance, according to Butler, is that it denaturalizes and demobilizes the hegemonic claims to essentialist identities. *Resignification* and *recontextualization* defy the validity of these claims (188).

In *Blue*, the flickering, absorbing void of the IKB screen simulates that productive, imaginative, psychological space within the spectator—a new, Lorenzian dimension of the embodied spectatorship described by Hallas. Similarly, his eloquent illustration of the phenomenon of embodied spectatorship, wherein he recounts the optical magic of his first viewing experience of *Blue*, is a kind of corollary to the text of the film itself, with Tilda Swinton at one point intoning that “for Blue there are no boundaries or solutions.”

In that description of his first viewing, Hallas wrote that he perceived the IKB screen as either “pure surface or depthless void” (226). I would venture that it is both: its apparent static impenetrability both signifies and enables its infinite interiority. This interior depth is so total, in fact, that it becomes exterior, as in Hallas’s description, with
the blue light spilling from the screen and absorbing its spectators into the void, dissolving the distinction between interior and exterior altogether. The solid blue surface, uncorrupted, is what makes this permeability possible. It transcends its own two-dimensionality.

Here, I’ve shown that *Blue* is a work of art that utilizes abstract drag, per Lorenz’s definition, and it is deeply connected to other works about HIV and AIDS in this way. But as my previous discussion of Butler showed, moving beyond Lorenz and considering *Blue* with broader ideas about “drag” also reveals a great deal about the film. In light of Hallas’s perception of *Blue* as “surface or void,” consider this question posed by Butler:

> If the body is not a ‘being,’ but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, then what language is left for understanding this corporeal enactment, gender, that constitutes its interior signification on its surface? (188)

Translating this question on to *Blue*, we can think of films as contained bodies that are subject to certain expectations and spectatorial relationships. In a conventional film, its “surface” — the screen and the images that play upon it — are subject to certain expectations: namely, that it will exhibit moving images, arranged in such a way that they convey a coherent and cohesive meaning, and that the spectator, depending on the film, will be positioned as observational, or voyeuristic, or passively receptive to the images on the screen. These carefully arranged images, and their corresponding sounds, are understood to be “the film” — these sounds and images comprise the medium and the
message in totality. To parallel Butler’s terms regarding the enactments of gender, the presumed meaning contained within the film is expressed through image and sound, just as Butler observes that the presumed “essential” feminine or masculine is conveyed by corresponding bodily signifiers. But, just as a drag performance plays upon the audience’s understanding of the ways these bodily signifiers convey interiority (and mocks or challenges that understanding), Blue plays upon spectators’ presumptions about the content and “boundaries” of film. It challenges their expectations of what a film “is” and can “do,” just as Jarman refuses to activate or engage with the spectator’s media-informed presumptions about PWAs, their bodies, and their lives.

Butler’s theorization of drag as a production postured as an imitation of gender that implicitly reveals the “imitative structure” of gender itself (187) is illuminating and revolutionary. While Blue is not immediately readable as a drag performance in this classic, campy sense, and it does not “do drag” on gender at all (though the “queer chant” section could be a contender for analysis here), a broader view of “drag” techniques—built from Butler, and expanded by Lorenz—carves new dimensions into Blue’s ever-expanding universe of meaning. Butler asks what “language” is left to understand gender, given that it is largely understood, and prescribed to be, an external expression of something essential within. Drag performances denaturalize these gender meanings and reveal that there is no essential essence, no “original” (188). With Blue, Jarman similarly highlights the limitations of cinematic “language,” particularly when representing the experiences of a queer person with AIDS. He smashes conventional expectations and, yet, takes them to an extreme: Blue is a surface, a boundary, but it is a radically permeable one.
CONCLUSION

Lorenz describes the “distribution” of her theory of drag as being based on “contagion rather than recognition” (35)—contagion signifying an active, ethical, productive exchange between artwork and viewer which “seeks to entangle the viewer as participant in denormalizing practices” (17), in contrast to the passive, receptive mode of mere recognition. Despite my earlier linking of her work to Butler’s, Lorenz actually argues that contagion “in no way corresponds to Judith Butler’s idea of a ‘performativity of gender’ and instead turns this on its head” (157). For Lorenz, the mode of “contagious drag,” which encompasses all the kinds of artistic drag she discusses in her book, is a strategy that “serves less to reproduce (post-)colonial and heteronormative conventions in performative repetition, or to focus on the process of production”—i.e., Butler—“than it does to draw attention to how breaks are made with…convention, and which lines of flight lead away” from it. Contagion, then, is simultaneously productive, in that it produces a distance from norms, and destructive, since it breaks with convention (157). But with respect for Lorenz’s argument, I don’t think that “contagious drag” and Butler’s ideas about how drag productions illuminate the performativity of gender are so different; after all, the spectator must recognize the convention itself before she understands that it has been transgressed or deconstructed.

I would instead characterize Butler’s and Lorenz’s ideas about drag not as opposed but as different phases of progression toward—while weary of thinking of this too linearly—the goal of ethical and political enlightenment. Classic drag performance, and Butler’s arguments about it, are necessarily narrowly based on gender, and on the revealing of all gender performance to be drag, an imitation of an original that does not
exist. Contagious drag is in the realm of productions of art—Lorenz finds contagious drag in performance art, film, and installations. It moves beyond the recognition that a dearly-held or assumed norm has been transgressed, or revealed to be artificial, and raises the stakes by charging the spectator with responding to it. And because, with these works, the norms being broken are those that harm and place limitations on “non-normative” people — people with non-normative sexualities and genders, sick and disabled people, people of color—the spectator is often confronted with her complicity in upholding that norm.

In the case of Blue, the spectator is not just complicit but implicit, to return to Hallas and the corporeal implication of spectating the film:

The profound significance of such corporeal implication cannot be underestimated during a pandemic in which people living with HIV and AIDS have consistently been subject to the spatial techniques of abjection, including pathology, stigmatization, social isolation, quarantine, and even incarceration. Cultural hysteria about the presumed contagion of the retrovirus has demanded that HIV-infected bodies be contained at as ‘safe distance.’ Blue reversed the visual attention of the spectacle of AIDS out there back onto the spectator’s own body right here before the blue screen. (230)

The corporeal implication at work in Blue reinforces the shared humanity between the body of a person with AIDS and the spectator, and that is indeed profound. Drawing attention to the “shared humanity” of people with AIDS and people without it was the
purported goal of portraits like Nixon and Solomon’s, which claimed to collapse the
distinction between PWAs and “the general public” but instead did nothing but reinforce
that stark and uneven difference. This is exemplified by the concluding line of Solomon’s
statement on her online portfolio: “Because all life leads inevitably to death, these
pictures are about all of us,” she writes. Aside from the fact that her statement flattens the
singular calamity of AIDS and equates AIDS deaths with all deaths, the very clear
message from her portraits is that these pictures are not about “us” but “them.” With the
Nixon and Solomon portraits, and similar representations, rhetoric about “shared
humanity” amounted not to sincere empathy for PWAs, to recognition of their identity
beyond AIDS, or to productive political action toward eradicating the epidemic or
improving access to healthcare, but instead to an erasure of the singularity of the PWA.
The subjects are irrevocably sorted into the category of “AIDS victim,” someone else’s
problem rather than a collective social issue (Watney, “Photography and AIDS,” 74). The
subjects in Nixon and Solomon’s portraits, and similar representations, are marked as
passive, suffering “AIDS victims,” a universal category constituted by images which are
“accepted because we recognize that we are all ultimately subject to the same common
order of mortality,” Watney writes in “Photography and AIDS.” But, quoting James
Baldwin, he argues that this “shared mortality should be a source of dignity, rather than a
pretext for oversimplification, since the awareness ‘that isolation and death are certain
and universal clarifies our responsibility’” (73-74).

Solomon could take note that responsibility is at the heart of true empathy,
connection, and recognition of shared mortality. Responsibility, plus the corporeal
implication, is “contagion.” Contagion, obviously a fraught metaphor to invoke when
speaking of HIV and AIDS, is the knowledge transmitted from the work—*Blue*, in this case—to the spectator that she is in some ways responsible for the human on the other end of that transmitting information, her other.

Contagion, the corporeal implication, and abstract drag all find a deep resonance with Emmanuel Levinas’s “ethics as first philosophy,” which contend that subjectivity is constituted by the asymmetrical encounter with the other. The other commands me; I take responsibility for the other without a guarantee of reciprocity; my ethical self is formed in being for the other (Levinas, “Ethics as First Philosophy,” 82-83; also explained by Hallas, 21-22). And here, with help from Levinas, I find the final “queer embodiment” at play in *Blue*.

This relationship to the Other, for Levinas, is expressed in the subject’s encounter with the face of the other. The face “signifies for me an unexceptionable responsibility preceding every free consent, every pact, every contract,” he wrote. “The disclosing of a face is nudity, non-form, abandon of self, ageing, dying, more naked than nudity.” It is “exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill” (Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 86-87). For Levinas, the ethical relationship is truly and literally embodied.

But some readers of Levinas question whether his explanation of the face-to-face encounter is literal, a question that finds purchase when considering *Blue*. When I write about embodiment and ethics, as I have before, I always think of Levinas, and wonder about the implications of the ethical relationship if there is no face of the other to behold, or if that face is somehow compromised, or packaged in another form. I was gratified when, fairly late in the process, I found Hallas grappling with this very question in the
introduction to his book. He writes that Levinas (like Jarman, we can infer, though Hallas does not write about Blue until much later in the book) was critical of vision, aligning visual perception the “ontological imperialism” of Western philosophical tradition, and thus many readers of Levinas have argued that “the face” is solely a “metaphysical trope in his philosophy that cannot signify the physical face of a person,” while others contend that that understanding the other’s face as an embodied, experiential phenomenon is critical (Hallas, 21). Hallas instead embraces the ambiguity of Levinas’s “performative” philosophy, concluding that, similarly, “the queer films and videos that I discuss in this book [such as Blue] performatively transform the mediated space of witnessing precisely as they bear witness” (21).

As spectators, we encounter Jarman in the IKB screen. Like the Other’s face, the screen is both an unassailable boundary, and a deep pool of knowledge. A human face, as Levinas so beautifully describes, is vulnerable; its presentation and its intactness signifies the promise of eventual violence, destruction, and decay (and the potential that you, the subject, will perpetrate this). But Jarman’s real “face” has already been violated. Destruction is already underway. Here, just as he subverts the spectacle of AIDS by substituting the film and its acoustics for his body, he subverts the possibility for his spectators to do him violence—yet, still, incredibly, demands the kind of radical responsibility that Levinas wrote the human face signified.

Jarman sought not to “represent AIDS” (like Nixon and Solomon claimed to, with their totalizing “these are people with AIDS” images), but to simply present his singular experience, but in so doing he emphasized the singularity of each life, of each PWA. Peake wrote that in Blue “Jarman…transmuted the pandemonium of images that had been
his boon and bane into a vibrant void in which, miraculously, he was more fully present than in almost any of his other films” (515). Even more miraculous, though, is his sacred summoning of so many others as he bore witness to his own experience—characters, dear friends, his spectators. *Blue*, like Jarman, may defy categorization, but along with film, soundtrack, audio painting, radio play, light show, and gay autobiography, it is also no less than a spiritual invocation, in the flesh.
CODA
Virality and Contagious Compassion

On page 33, I wrote that *Blue* was “a film without film, a ‘film without images’ (Moor, 49), a ‘visual document without visuals’ (Khalip, 76).” In a late draft of this thesis, a reader wrote in the margin next to those lines: “virus without a body.”

Discussing this project later, it became clear that virality was an inherent, but so far unmarked, companion to the concept of aesthetic and ethical contagion I drew from Lorenz. Contagion, after all, is an action, a state; it doesn’t describe what is being transmitted.

Before getting too deep into this metaphor, it’s important to emphasize that HIV is infectious and communicable, but it is not contagious (“Glossary”). Loudly and clearly making this distinction is critical to dispelling myths that HIV can be transmitted by casual contact. That said, responsible reappropriation of the language of “contagion” and “virality” with respect to art about HIV/AIDS can encourage compassion and challenge stigma.

To return to *Blue*, the “virus without a body”: in my conclusion, I wrote that the marker of *Blue*’s contagiousness was in its beautiful utilization of abstract drag and the corporeal implication, which engenders empathy, connection, and responsibility within the spectator. But leaving the analysis there may decenter the true subject of the film, and do some injustice to Jarman and his intentions. He conveys as much himself, right at the beginning of the film, by dismissing news of the war in Bosnia because “all that concerns either life or death is all transacting and at work within me.” Within him, not within us.

In *Blue*, Jarman approximates his blindness, imposes it on us, forces us to feel and listen to all that life and death roiling within him. *Blue* is deliberately difficult to sit
through. We don’t watch it; we endure it, as Jarman endured his illness. It is this experience that separates *Blue* from the Nixon and Solomon portraits and those like them.

Looking at *Blue* as a disembodied “virus,” an agent of contagious compassion, necessitates new temporal and historical considerations as well. I wrote about how *Blue* is built to transcend its own flawed and mortal form, having been shown as a film, a radio play, a light installation, etc., in the twenty-two years since its release. Then, in 1994, it was broadcast over the UK’s public networks; today, it lives on DVD and in bits and pieces on YouTube (it was posted there in its entirety until recently). After listening to me speak about *Blue* and its potential for transforming the spectator’s understanding of AIDS, a friend asked about awareness of and access to the film, assuming (probably correctly) that people who know about *Blue* are already likely to be familiar with Jarman and sympathetic to more expansive, contextualized and empathetic representations of AIDS. Does *Blue* really “work” as a piece of viral media in 2016? Can the mythical “general public” withstand its difficulty, its singular intensity? Does watching it in clips on YouTube diminish its integrity, or is this just another example of *Blue*’s transcendence of its form, just another queer embodiment?

Honestly: I don’t know. *Blue* is supposed to be difficult and, if all the hand-wringing thinkpieces on our shrinking attention spans and increasingly mediated lives are on to something, it seems that we have an increasing aversion to difficulty. Meanwhile, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that nearly 13% of the 1.2 million people in the United States living with HIV are unaware of their infection; that there are 50,000 new HIV infections per year; and that people of color, particularly black Americans, and transgender people bear a disproportionately severe
burden of total infections (“HIV in the United States: At A Glance”). Additionally, and alarmingly, they report that the rate of HIV diagnosis has dropped by 5.6% in the general U.S. population from 2008 to 2012—but HIV infection rates have actually increased for men who have sex with men in that time (“CDC Fact Sheet: HIV among Gay and Bisexual Men”). Similar trends have been observed in the UK (“HIV in the United Kingdom: 2014 Report”). All of this data suggests a grave and compounding failure of our government and institutions of public health to properly educate and empower the public, especially disadvantaged and at-risk people.

*Blue* is very much a product of its time, and that was a time before the advent of the game-changing antiretroviral drugs that drew a bright before/after line through the epidemic. But “after” wasn’t the end—not even close, as the CDC data indicates (and, of course, these numbers give no allusion to enormous global dimensions of the epidemic). Given the CDC data, perhaps now is the time to return to artifacts from “before,” like *Blue*, not to commemorate or even to remember, but to learn. To understand. To fully grasp what AIDS was, and what it continues to be.

It will take work. Compassion can be hard to catch, and *Blue*’s slow, laborious virality isn’t easily transmutable to our current moment, when—at risk of being too reductive here—“virality” correlates to rates of speed, ephemerality, disposability. *Blue* is elusive, a little bit inscrutable; it demands patience and discipline, and that can’t be shortcut. Still, while it has outlived Jarman, and, yes, lives on in DVD and in clips and in light installations, nothing is permanent and it, like everything else, will one day disappear. Jarman himself predicts this in the very last lines of the film:
Our name will be forgotten

In time

No one will remember our work

Our life will pass like the traces of a cloud

And be scattered like

Mist that is chased by the

Rays of the sun

For our time is the passing of a shadow

And our lives will run like

Sparks through the stubble.

What I have learned, I think, from *Blue*, is that its plural forms, its many mediations, are conceptually significant, but may be secondary to “catching” *Blue*’s viral compassion. The critical media here are our bodies, ours and Jarman’s, all flawed in many ways, hopelessly bound, hopelessly mortal, vulnerable to all kinds of attacks and invasions and degradations. What matters most here are the eyes, souls, and hearts on both sides of the IKB screen.
I began my serious work on this thesis in the fall semester of 2015 in the course “Remix Practices” with Professor J.R. Osborn. In that course, we were tasked with creating “remixes” for our final projects. Already deep in my research on Blue, I decided instead to make an “unmix”: I identified four distinct narrative threads in the film’s script, color-coded them, and then pieced each thread of text together for further analysis. I also included a color-coded “mix” of the intact script.

This work of taking apart the text was invaluable to my own understanding of Blue, and the final results of that project are vestigially present in every word of this thesis. But I also think that it may be useful to other researchers who are interested in doing close readings of the narration or doing a more in-depth analysis of how the threads relate to one another. Studying how the acoustic and musical scores match (or don’t) within each section would be a particularly rich study, for example.

To this end, I include here both my mix and my unmix, which are posted in their entirety at https://sites.google.com/a/georgetown.edu/remix/home along with a short piece I wrote to accompany it. I begin with excerpts from the introduction and the conclusion to that piece to further explain my method and my results. As in the body of my thesis, the text of Blue is taken from the script provided online by the Queer Cultural Center.
INTRODUCTION. I felt that I could identify four distinct narrative threads in the text, which I classified as follows: Blue the Boy, in which Jarman tells the tale of Blue, an epic hero figure who goes on a sort of quest, meets a foe, and eventually—maybe?—dies; In Real Time, the “harsh realities” narrative, which is by far the largest part of the narration; Blue the Color/Poetic Fancy, a fairly tricky category in which the color blue (Blue) takes on philosophical or poetic qualities; and finally Memory, in which Jarman recounts his past, from his childhood, to the freewheeling 1970s, to the elegizing of dead friends, to more abstract poetic musings that I felt had the dream-like nostalgia of memory. I assigned colors to each of these threads, and coded my copy of the monologue accordingly. While my choices regarding color assignments were probably informed by my own subconscious associations with each color, the assignments aren’t meant to signify anything in particular. My only deliberate choice regarding colors was to avoid dark blue, because I didn’t want to attach any particular thread with that color and thus suggest it was primary or somehow more meaningful than the others. Still, I’m open to the fact that readers will naturally bring their own associations with each of the colors to the project, and I would be interested to hear what they glean from my color assignments.

Next, I reproduced my coded text on my project page so that readers would have a holistic visual guide to the unmixed text. I included a key, which noted each category and was linked to its corresponding section on the Blue: Unmixed page, where the narratives were each shown as cohesive texts.

I wouldn’t go as far as saying that my decisions about categorizing these narrative threads were arbitrary, like my color assignments, but they were certainly highly subjective. I could easily add subcategories and caveats to each of my threads, and I could probably classify the monologue entirely differently just as easily. In no way do I consider this code definitive, lest we forget that a significant part of experiencing Blue is to grapple with its ambiguity.

However, these four threads were the ones that instinctively made sense to me. I would invite others to contest my categorization method or to share their ideas about other ways to unmix the text.

CONCLUSION. Since I’ve shown that my whole process was totally subjective and contestable, and that the strength of Blue is in its ambiguity, I could justifiably conclude that Blue isn’t meant to be untangled. While that may be, and while I recognize now just how much about Blue I would like to learn, my understanding of the film has been significantly deepened by this exercise. Blue is an incredibly difficult film to decipher, and I think that this process of unmixing can aid immensely in the attempt to make sense of it. What I didn’t expect to learn is that accepting you will be confounded by Blue is integral to appreciating its narration.
You say to the boy open your eyes
When he opens his eyes and sees the light
You make him cry out. Saying
O Blue come forth
O Blue arise
O Blue ascend
O Blue come in

I am sitting with some friends in this cafe drinking coffee served by young refugees from Bosnia. The war rages across the newspapers and through the ruined streets of Sarajevo.

Tania said 'Your clothes are on back to front and inside out". Since there were only two of us there I took them off and put them right then and there. I am always here before the doors open.

What need of so much news from abroad while all that concerns either life or death is all transacting and at work within me.

I step off the kerb and a cyclist nearly knocks me down. Flying in from the dark he nearly parted my hair.

I step into a blue funk.

The doctor in St. Bartholomew’s Hospital thought he could detect lesions in my retina - the pupils dilated with belladonna - the torch shone into them with a terrible blinding light.

Look left
Look down
Look up
Look right

Blue flashes in my eyes.
Blue Bottle buzzing
Lazy days
The sky blue butterfly
Sways on the cornflower
Lost in the warmth
Of the blue heat haze
Singing the blues
Quiet and slowly

Blue of my heart
Blue of my dreams
Slow blue love
Of delphinium days

Blue is the universal love in which man bathes - it is the terrestrial paradise.

I'm walking along the beach in a howling gale -
Another year is passing
In the roaring waters
I hear the voices of dead friends
Love is life that lasts forever.
My heart's memory turns to you
David. Howard. Graham. Terry. Paul... 

But what if this present
Were the world's last night
In the setting sun your love fades
Dies in the moonlight
Fails to rise
Thrice denied by cock crow
In the dawn's first light

Look left
Look down
Look up
Look right
The camera flash
Atomic bright
Photos
The CMV - a green moon then the world turns magenta
My retina
Is a distant planet
A red Mars
From a Boy's Own comic
With yellow infection
Bubbling at the corner
I said this looks like a planet
The doctor says - "Oh, I think
It looks like a pizza"
The worst of the illness is uncertainty. I’ve played this scenario back and forth each hour of the day for the last six years. Blue transcends the solemn geography of human limits.

I am home with the blinds drawn.
H.B. is back from Newcastle.
But gone out - the washing
Machine is roaring away
And the fridge is defrosting
These are his favourite sounds

I’ve been given the option of being an inpatient at the hospital or to coming in twice a day to be hooked to a drip. My vision will never come back.

The retina is destroyed, though when the bleeding stops what is left of my sight might improve. I have to come to terms with sightlessness.

If I lose my sight will my vision be halved?

The virus rages fierce. I have no friends now who are not dead or dying. Like a blue frost it caught them. At work, at the cinema, on marches and beaches. In churches on their knees, running, flying, silent or shouting protest.

It started with sweats in the night and swollen glands. Then the black cancer spread across their faces - as they fought for breath TB and pneumonia hammered their lungs, and Toxo at the brain. Reflexes scrambled - sweat poured through hair matter like lianas in the tropical forest. Voices slurred - and then were lost forever. My pen chased this story across the page tossed this way and that in the storm.

The blood of sensibility is blue
I consecrate myself
To find its most perfect expression

My sight failed a little more in the night
H.B. offers me his blood
It will kill everything he says

The drip of DHPG
Trills like a canary

I am accompanied by a shadow into which H.B. appears and disappears. I have lost the sight on the periphery of my right eye.

I hold out my hands before me and slowly part them. At a certain moment they disappear out of the corner of my eyes. This is how I used to see. Now if I repeat the motion this is all I see.
I shall not win the battle against the virus - in spite of the slogans like "Living with AIDS". The virus was appropriated by the well - so we have to live with AIDS while they spread the quilt for the moths of Ithaca across the wine-dark sea.

Awareness is heightened by this, but something else is lost. A sense of reality drowned in theatre.

Thinking blind, becoming blind.

In the hospital it is as quiet as a tomb. The nurse fights to find a vein in my right arm. We give up after five attempts. Would you faint if someone stuck a needle into your arm? I've got used to it - but I still shut my eyes.

The Gautama Buddha instructs me to walk away from illness. But he wasn't attached to a drip.

Fate is the strongest
Fate Fated Fatal
I resign myself to Fate
Blind Fate
The drip stings
A lump swells up in my arm
Out comes the drip
An electric shock sparks up my arm

How can I walk away with a drip attached to me?
How am I going to walk away from this?

I fill this room with the echo of many voices
Who passed time here
Voices unlocked from the blue of the long dried paint
The sun comes and floods this empty room
I call it my room
My room has welcomed many summers
Embraced laughter and tears
Can it fill itself with your laughter
Each word a sunbeam
Glancing in the light
This is the song of My Room
Blue stretches, yawns and is awake.

There is a photo in the newspaper this morning of refugees leaving Bosnia. They look out of time. Peasant women with scarves and black dresses stepped from the pages of an older Europe. One of them has lost her three children.

Lightning flickers through the hospital window - at the door an elderly woman stands waiting for the rain to clear. I ask her if I can give her a lift, I've hailed a taxi. "Can you take me to Holborn tube?" On the
way she breaks down in tears. She has come from Edinburgh. Her son is in the ward - he has meningitis and has lost the use of his legs - I'm helpless as the tears flow. I can't see her. Just the sound of her sobbing.

One can know the whole world Without stirring abroad Without looking out of the window One can see the way of heaven The further one goes The less one knows

In the pandemonium of image I present you with the universal Blue Blue an open door to soul An infinite possibility Becoming tangible

Here I am again in the waiting room. Hell on Earth is a waiting room. Here you know you are not in control of yourself, waiting for your name to be called: "712213". Here you have no name, confidentiality is nameless. Where is 666? Am I sitting opposite him/her? Maybe 666 is the demented woman switching the channels on the TV.

What do I see Past the gates of conscience Activists invading Sunday Mass In the cathedral An epic Czar Ivan denouncing the Patriarch of Moscow A moon-faced boy who spits and repeatedly Crosses himself - as he genuflects Will the pearly gates slam shut in The faces of the devout

The demented woman is discussing needles - there is always a discussion here. She has a line put into her neck. How are we perceived, if we are to be perceived at all? For the most part we are invisible.

If the doors of perception were cleansed then everything would be seen as it is.

The dog barks, the caravan passes. Marco Polo stumbles across the Blue Mountain.

Marco Polo stops and sits on a lapis throne by the River Oxus while he is ministered to by the descendants of Alexander the Great. The caravan approaches, blue canvasses fluttering in the wind. Blue people from over the sea - ultramarine - have come to collect the lapis with its flecks of gold.
The road to the city of Aqua Vitae is protected by a labyrinth built from crystals and mirrors which in the sunlight cause terrible blindness. The mirrors reflect each of your betrayals, magnify them and drive you into madness.

Blue walks into the labyrinth. Absolute silence is demanded of all its visitors, so their presence does not disturb the poets who are directing the excavations. Digging can only proceed on the calmest of days as rain and wind destroy the finds.

The archaeology of sound has only just been perfected and the systematic cataloguing of words has until recently been undertaken in a haphazard way. Blue watched as a word or phrase materialised in scintillating sparks, a poetry of fire which casts everything into darkness with the brightness of its reflections.

As a teenager I used to work for the Royal National Institute for the Blind on their Christmas appeal for radios, with dear miss Punch, seventy years old, who used to arrive each morning on her Harley Davidson.

She kept us on our toes. Her job as a gardener gave her time to spare in January. Miss Punch Leather Woman was the first out dyke I ever met. Closeted and frightened by my sexuality she was my hope. "Climb on, let’s go for a ride." She looked like Edith Piaf, a sparrow, and wore a cock-eyed beret at a saucy angle. She bossed all the other old girls who came back year after year for her company.

In the paper today. Three quarters of the AIDS organisations are not providing safer sex information. One district said they had no queers in their community, but you might try district X - they have a theatre.

My sight seems to have closed in. The hospital is even quieter this morning. Hushed. I have a sinking feeling in my stomach. I feel defeated. My mind bright as a button but my body falling apart - a naked light bulb in a dark and ruined room. There is death in the air here but we are not talking about it. But I know the silence might be broken by distraught visitors screaming, "Help, Sister! Help Nurse!" followed by the sound of feet rushing along the corridor. Then silence.

Blue protects white from innocence
Blue drags black with it
Blue is darkness made visible
Blue protects white from innocence
Blue drags black with it
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Over the mountains is the shrine to Rita, where all at the end of the line call. Rita is the Saint of the Lost Cause. The saint of all who are at their wit’s end, who are hedged in and trapped by the facts of the world. These facts, detached from cause, trapped the Blue Eyed Boy
in a system of unreality. Would all these blurred facts that deceive
dissolve in his last breath? For accustomed to believing in image, an
absolute idea of value, his world had forgotten the command of essence:
Thou Shall Not Create Unto Thyself Any Graven Image, although you know
the task is to fill the empty page. From the bottom of your heart, pray
to be released from image.

Time is what keeps the light from reaching us.

The image is a prison of the soul, your heredity, your education, your
vices and aspirations, your qualities, your psychological world.

I have walked behind the sky.
For what are you seeking?
The fathomless blue of Bliss.

To be an astronaut of the void, leave the comfortable house that
imprisons you with reassurance.
Remember,
To be going and to have are not eternal - fight the fear that engenders
the beginning, the middle and the end.

For Blue there are no boundaries or solutions.

How did my friends cross the cobalt river, with what did they pay the
ferryman? As they set out for the indigo shore under this jet-black sky
- some died on their feet with a backward glance. Did they see Death
with the hell hounds pulling a dark chariot, bruised blue-black growing
dark in the absence of light, did they hear the blast of trumpets?

David ran home panicked on the train from Waterloo, brought back
exhausted and unconscious to die that night. Terry who mumbled
incoherently into his incontinent tears. Others faded like flowers cut
by the scythe of the Blue Bearded Reaper, parched as the waters of life
receded. Howard turned slowly to stone, petrified day by day, his mind
imprisoned in a concrete fortress until all we could hear were his
groans on the telephone circling the globe.

Mad Vincent sits on his yellow chair clasping his knees to his chest -
Bananas. The sunflowers wilt in the empty pot, bone dry, skeletal, the
black seeds picked into the staring face of a Halloween pumpkin. He is
unaware of Blue standing in the corner. Fevered eyes glare at the
jaundiced corn, caw of the jet-black crows spiralling in the yellow.
The lemon goblin stares from the unwanted canvasses thrown in a corner.
Sourpuss suicide screams with evil - clasping cowardly Yellowbelly,
slit eyed.

Blue fights diseased Yellowbelly whose fetid breath scorches the trees
yellow with ague. Betrayal is the oxygen of his devilry. He'll stab you
in the back. Yellowbelly places a jaundiced kiss in the air, the stink
of pubs blinds Blue's eyes. Evil swims in the yellow bile. Yellowbelly's snake eyes poison. He crawls over Eve's rotting apple wasp-like. Quick as a flash he stings Blue in the mouth - "AAAUGH!" - his hellish legion buzz and chuckle in the mustard gas. They'll piss all over you. Sharp nicotine-stained fangs bared. Blue transformed into an insectocutor, his Blue aura frying the foes.

We all contemplated suicide
We hoped for euthanasia
We were lulled into believing
Morphine dispelled pain
Rather than making it tangible
Like a mad Disney cartoon
Transforming itself into
Every conceivable nightmare

Karl killed himself - how did he do it? I never asked. It seemed incidental. What did it matter if he swigged prussic acid or shot himself in the eye. Maybe he dived into the streets from high up in the cloud lapped skyscrapers.

The nurse explains the implant. You mix the drugs and drip yourself once a day. The drugs are kept in a small fridge they give you. Can you imagine travelling around with that? The metal implant will set the bomb detector off in airports, and I can just see myself travelling to Berlin with a fridge under my arm.

Impatient youths of the sun
Burning with many colours
Flick combs through hair
In bathroom mirrors
Fucking with fusion and fashion
Dance in the beams of emerald lasers
Mating on suburban duvets
Cum splattered nuclear breeders
What a time that was.

The drip ticks out the seconds, the source of a stream along which the minutes flow, to join the river of hours, the sea of years and the timeless ocean.

The side effects of DHPG, the drug for which I have to come into hospital to be dripped twice a day, are: Low white blood cell count, increased risk of infection, low platelet count which may increase the risk of bleeding, low red blood cell count (anaemia), fever, rash, abnormal liver function, chills, swelling of the body (oedema), infections, malaise, irregular heart beat, high blood pressure (hypertension), low blood pressure (hypotension), abnormal thoughts or dreams, loss of balance (ataxia), come, confusion, dizziness, headache, nervousness, damage to nerves (peristhelia), psychosis, sleepiness (somnolence), shaking, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite (anorexia),
diarrhoea, bleeding from the stomach or intestine (intestinal haemorrhage), abdominal pain, increased number of one type of white blood cell, low blood sugar, shortness of breath, hair loss (alopecia), itching (pruritus), hives, blood in the urine, abnormal kidney functions, increased blood urea, redness (inflammation), pain or irritation (phlebitis).

Retinal detachments have been observed in patients both before and after initiation of therapy. The drug has caused decreased sperm production in animals and may cause infertility in humans, and birth defects in animals. Although there is no information in human studies, it should be considered a potential carcinogen since it causes tumours in animals.

If you are concerned about any of the above side-effects or if you would like any further information, please ask your doctor.

In order to be put on the drug you have to sign a piece of paper stating you understand that all these illnesses are a possibility.

I really can't see what I am to do. I am going to sign it.

The darkness comes in with the tide
The year slips on the calendar
Your kiss flares
A match struck in the night
Flares and dies
My slumber broken
Kiss me again
Kiss me
Kiss me again
And again
Never enough
Greedy lips
Speedwell eyes
Blue skies

A man sits in his wheelchair, hair awry, munching through a packet of dry biscuits, slow and deliberate as a praying mantis. He speaks enthusiastically but sometimes incoherently of the hospice. he says, "You can't be too careful who you mix with there, there's no way of telling the visitors, patients or staff apart. The staff have nothing to identify them except they are all in leather. The place is like an S&M club." This hospice has been built by charity, the names of the donors displayed for all to see.

Charity has allowed the uncaring to appear to care and is terrible for those dependent on it. It has become big business as the government shirks its responsibilities in these uncaring times. We go along with this, so the rich and powerful who fucked us over once fuck us over
again and get it both ways. We have always been mistreated, so if anyone gives us the slightest sympathy we overreact with our thanks.

I am a mannish
Muff diving
Size queen
With bad attitude
An arse licking
Psychofag
Molesting the flies of privacy
Balling lesbian boys
A perverted heterodemon
Crossing purpose with death

I am a cock sucking
Straight acting
Lesbian man
With ball crushing bad manners
Laddish nymphomaniac politics
Spunky sexist desires
of incestuous inversion and
Incorrect terminology
I am a Not Gay

H.B. is in the kitchen
Greasing his hair
He guards the space
Against me
He calls it his office
At nine we leave for the hospital

H.B. comes back from the eye dept
Where all my notes are muddled
He says
It's like Romania in there
Two light bulbs
Grimly illuminate
The flaking walls
There is a box of dolls
In the corner
Indescribably grim
The doctor says
Well of course
The kids don't see them
There are no resources
To brighten the place up

My eyes sting from the drops
The infection has halted
The flash leaves
Scarlet after image
Of the blood vessels in my eye

Teeth chattering February
Cold as death
Pushes at the bedsheets
An aching cold
Interminable as marble
My mind
Frosted with drugs ices up
A drift of empty snowflakes
Whiting out memory
A blinkered twister
Circling in spirals
Cross-eyed meddlesome consciousness
Shall I? Will I?
Doodling death watch
Mind how you go

Oral DHPG is consumed by the liver, so they have tweaked a molecule to fool the system. What risk is there? If I had to live forty years blind, I might think twice. Treat my illness like the dodgems: music, bright lights, bumps and throw yourself into life again.

The pills are the most difficult, some taste bitter, others are too large. I'm taking about thirty a day, a walking chemical laboratory. I gag on them as I swallow them and they come up half dissolved in the coughing and the spluttering.

My skins sits on me like the shirt of Nessus. My face irritates, as do my back and legs at night. I toss and turn, scratching, unable to sleep. I get up, turn on the light. Stagger to the bathroom. If I become so tired, maybe I'll sleep. Films chase through my mind. Once in a while I dream a dream as magnificent as the Taj Mahal. I cross southern India with a young spirit guide - India the land of my dreaming childhood. The souvenirs in Moselle's peach and grey living room. Granny called Moselle, called 'Girly,' called May. An orphan who lost her name, which was Ruben. Jade, monkeys, ivory miniatures, mah-jongg. The winds and bamboos of China.

All the old taboos of
Blood lines and blood banks
Blue blood and bad blood
Our blood and your blood
I sit here - you sit there

As I slept a jet slammed into a tower block. The jet was almost empty but two hundred people were fried in their sleep.
The earth is dying and we do not notice it.

A young man frail as Belsen
Walks slowly down the corridor
His pale green hospital pyjamas
Hanging off him
It's very quiet
Just the distant coughing
My jugs eye blots out the
Young man who has just walked past
My field of vision
This illness knocks you for six
Just as you start to forget it
A bullet in the back of my head
Might be easier
You know, you can take longer than
The second world war to get to the grave.

Ages and Aeons quit the room
Exploding into timelessness
No entrances or exits now
No need for obituaries or final judgements
We knew that time would end
After tomorrow at sunrise
We scrubbed the floors
And did the washing up
It would not catch us unawares

The white flashes you are experiencing in your eyes are common when the retina is damaged.

The damaged retina has started to peel away leaving the innumerable black floaters, like a flock of starlings around in the twilight.
I am back at St Mary's to have my eyes looked at by the specialist. The place is the same, but there is new staff. How relieved I am not to have the operation this morning to have a tap put into my chest. I must try and cheer up H.B. as he has had a hell of a fortnight. In the waiting room a little grey man over the way is fretting as he has to get to Sussex. He says, "I am going blind, I cannot read any longer."

A little later he picks up a newspaper, struggles with it for a moment and throws it back on the table. My stinging eye-drops have stopped me reading, so I write this in a haze of belladonna. The little grey man's face has fallen into tragedy. He looks like Jean Cocteau without the poet's refined arrogance. The room is full of men and women squinting into the dark in different states of illness. Some barely able to walk, distress and anger on every face and then a terrible resignation.

Jean Cocteau takes off his glasses, he looks about him with an indescribable meanness. He has black slip-on shoes, blue socks, grey trousers, a Fairisle sweater and a herringbone jacket. The posters that plaster the walls above him have endless question marks, HIV/AIDS?, AIDS?, HIV?, ARE YOU INFECTED BY HIV/AIDS?, ARC?, HIV? This is a hard wait. The shattering bright light of the eye specialist's camera leaves that empty sky blue after-image. Did I really see green the first time?
The after-image dissolves in a second. As the photographs progress, colours change to pink and the light turns to orange. The process is a torture, but the result, stable eyesight, worth the price and the twelve pills I have to take a day. Sometimes looking at them I fell nauseous and want to skip them. It must be my association with H.B., lover of the computer and king of the keyboard that brought my luck on the computer which chose my name for this drug trial. I nearly forgot as I left St Mary's I smiled at Jean Cocteau. He gave a sweet smile back.

I caught myself looking at shoes in a shop window. I thought of going in and buying a pair, but stopped myself. The shoes I am wearing at the moment should be sufficient to walk me out of life.

Pearl fishers
In azure seas
Deep waters
Washing the isle of the dead
In coral harbours
Amphora
Spill
Gold
Across the still seabed
We lie there
Fanned by the billowing
Sails of forgotten ships
Tossed by the mournful winds
Of the deep
Lost Boys
Sleep forever
In a dear embrace
Salt lips touching
In submarine gardens
Cool marble fingers
Touch an antique smile
Shell sounds
Whisper
Deep love drifting on the tide forever
The smell of him
Dead good looking
In beauty's summer
His blue jeans
Around his ankles
Bliss in my ghostly eye
Kiss me
On the lips
On the eyes
Our name will be forgotten
In time
No one will remember our work
Our life will pass like the traces of a cloud
And be scattered like
Mist that is chased by the
Rays of the sun
For our time is the passing of a shadow
And our lives will run like
Sparks through the stubble.

I place a delphinium, Blue, upon your grave.

BLUE: UNMIXED

Green

Blue the Boy

You say to the boy open your eyes
When he opens his eyes and sees the light
You make him cry out. Saying
O Blue come forth
O Blue arise
O Blue ascend
O Blue come in

Blue stretches, yawns and is awake.
The dog barks, the caravan passes.
Marco Polo stumbles across the Blue Mountain.

Marco Polo stops and sits on a lapis throne by the River Oxus while he
is ministered to by the descendants of Alexander the Great. The caravan
approaches, blue canvasses fluttering in the wind. Blue people from
over the sea – ultramarine – have come to collect the lapis with its
flecks of gold.

The road to the city of Aqua Vitae is protected by a labyrinth built
from crystals and mirrors which in the sunlight cause terrible
blindness. The mirrors reflect each of your betrayals, magnify them and
drive you into madness.

Blue walks into the labyrinth. Absolute silence is demanded of all its
visitors, so their presence does not disturb the poets who are
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days as rain and wind destroy the finds.

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systematic cataloguing of words has until recently been undertaken in a
haphazard way. Blue watched as a word or phrase materialised in
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Mad Vincent sits on his yellow chair clasping his knees to his chest - Bananas. The sunflowers wilt in the empty pot, bone dry, skeletal, the black seeds picked into the staring face of a Halloween pumpkin. He is unaware of Blue standing in the corner. Fevered eyes glare at the jaundiced corn, caw of the jet-black crows spiralling in the yellow. The lemon goblin stares from the unwanted canvasses thrown in a corner. Sourpuss suicide screams with evil - clasping cowardly Yellowbelly, slit eyed.

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Red

In Real Time

I am sitting with some friends in this cafe drinking coffee served by young refugees from Bosnia. The war rages across the newspapers and through the ruined streets of Sarajevo.

Tania said 'Your clothes are on back to front and inside out". Since there were only two of us there I took them off and put them right then and there. I am always here before the doors open.

What need of so much news from abroad while all that concerns either life or death is all transacting and at work within me.

I step off the kerb and a cyclist nearly knocks me down. Flying in from the dark he nearly parted my hair.
I step into a blue funk.

The doctor in St. Bartholomew’s Hospital thought he could detect lesions in my retina - the pupils dilated with belladonna - the torch shone into them with a terrible blinding light.

Look left
Look down
Look up
Look right

Look left
Look down
Look up
Look right
The camera flash
Atomic bright
Photos
The CMV – a green moon then the world turns magenta
My retina
Is a distant planet
A red Mars
From a Boy's Own comic
With yellow infection
Bubbling at the corner
I said this looks like a planet
The doctor says – "Oh, I think
It looks like a pizza"

The worst of the illness is uncertainty. I’ve played this scenario back and forth each hour of the day for the last six years.
Blue transcends the solemn geography of human limits.

I am home with the blinds drawn
H.B. is back from Newcastle
But gone out - the washing
Machine is roaring away
And the fridge is defrosting
These are his favourite sounds

I’ve been given the option of being an inpatient at the hospital or to coming in twice a day to be hooked to a drip. My vision will never come back.

The retina is destroyed, though when the bleeding stops what is left of my sight might improve. I have to come to terms with sightlessness.

If I lose my sight will my vision be halved?

The virus rages fierce. I have no friends now who are not dead or dying. Like a blue frost it caught them. At work, at the cinema, on
marches and beaches. In churches on their knees, running, flying, silent or shouting protest.

My sight failed a little more in the night
H.B. offers me his blood
It will kill everything he says

The drip of DHPG
Trills like a canary

I am accompanied by a shadow into which H.B. appears and disappears. I have lost the sight on the periphery of my right eye.

I hold out my hands before me and slowly part them. At a certain moment they disappear out of the corner of my eyes. This is how I used to see. Now if I repeat the motion this is all I see.

I shall not win the battle against the virus - in spite of the slogans like "Living with AIDS". The virus was appropriated by the well - so we have to live with AIDS while they spread the quilt for the moths of Ithaca across the wine-dark sea.

Awareness is heightened by this, but something else is lost. A sense of reality drowned in theatre.

Thinking blind, becoming blind.

In the hospital it is as quiet as a tomb. The nurse fights to find a vein in my right arm. We give up after five attempts. Would you faint if someone stuck a needle into your arm? I've got used to it - but I still shut my eyes.

The Gautama Buddha instructs me to walk away from illness. But he wasn't attached to a drip.

Fate is the strongest
Fate Fated Fatal
I resign myself to Fate
Blind Fate
The drip stings
A lump swells up in my arm
Out comes the drip
An electric shock sparks up my arm

How can I walk away with a drip attached to me?
How am I going to walk away from this?

I fill this room with the echo of many voices
Who passed time here
Voices unlocked from the blue of the long dried paint
The sun comes and floods this empty room
I call it my room
My room has welcomed many summers
Embraced laughter and tears
Can it fill itself with your laughter
Each word a sunbeam
Glancing in the light
This is the song of My Room

There is a photo in the newspaper this morning of refugees leaving Bosnia. They look out of time. Peasant women with scarves and black dresses stepped from the pages of an older Europe. One of them has lost her three children.

Lightning flickers through the hospital window - at the door an elderly woman stands waiting for the rain to clear. I ask her if I can give her a lift, I've hailed a taxi. "Can you take me to Holborn tube?" On the way she breaks down in tears. She has come from Edinburgh. Her son is in the ward - he has meningitis and has lost the use of his legs - I'm helpless as the tears flow. I can't see her. Just the sound of her sobbing.

Here I am again in the waiting room. Hell on Earth is a waiting room. Here you know you are not in control of yourself, waiting for your name to be called: "712213". Here you have no name, confidentiality is nameless. Where is 666? Am I sitting opposite him/her? Maybe 666 is the demented woman switching the channels on the TV.

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My sight seems to have closed in. The hospital is even quieter this morning. Hushed. I have a sinking feeling in my stomach. I feel defeated. My mind bright as a button but my body falling apart - a naked light bulb in a dark and ruined room. There is death in the air here but we are not talking about it. But I know the silence might be broken by distraught visitors screaming, "Help, Sister! Help Nurse!" followed by the sound of feet rushing along the corridor. Then silence.

The nurse explains the implant. You mix the drugs and drip yourself once a day. The drugs are kept in a small fridge they give you. Can you imagine travelling around with that? The metal implant will set the bomb detector off in airports, and I can just see myself travelling to Berlin with a fridge under my arm.
The drip ticks out the seconds, the source of a stream along which the minutes flow, to join the river of hours, the sea of years and the timeless ocean.

The side effects of DHPG, the drug for which I have to come into hospital to be dripped twice a day, are: Low white blood cell count, increased risk of infection, low platelet count which may increase the risk of bleeding, low red blood cell count (anaemia), fever, rush, abnormal liver function, chills, swelling of the body (oedema), infections, malaise, irregular heart beat, high blood pressure (hypertension), low blood pressure (hypotension), abnormal thoughts or dreams, loss of balance (ataxia), come, confusion, dizziness, headache, nervousness, damage to nerves (peristhecia), psychosis, sleepiness (somnolence), shaking, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite (anorexia), diarrhoea, bleeding from the stomach or intestine (intestinal haemorrhage), abdominal pain, increased number of one type of white blood cell, low blood sugar, shortness of breath, hair loss (alopecia), itching (pruritus), hives, blood in the urine, abnormal kidney functions, increased blood urea, redness (inflammation), pain or irritation (phlebitis).

Retinal detachments have been observed in patients both before and after initiation of therapy. The drug has caused decreased sperm production in animals and may cause infertility in humans, and birth defects in animals. Although there is no information in human studies, it should be considered a potential carcinogen since it causes tumours in animals.

If you are concerned about any of the above side-effects or if you would like any further information, please ask your doctor.

In order to be put on the drug you have to sign a piece of paper stating you understand that all these illnesses are a possibility.

I really can't see what I am to do. I am going to sign it.

A man sits in his wheelchair, hair awry, munching through a packet of dry biscuits, slow and deliberate as a praying mantis. He speaks enthusiastically but sometimes incoherently of the hospice. he says, "You can't be too careful who you mix with there, there's no way of telling the visitors, patients or staff apart. The staff have nothing to identify them except they are all in leather. The place is like an S&M club." This hospice has been built by charity, the names of the donors displayed for all to see.

Charity has allowed the uncaring to appear to care and is terrible for those dependent on it. It has become big business as the government shirks its responsibilities in these uncaring times. We go along with this, so the rich and powerful who fucked us over once fuck us over again and get it both ways. We have always been mistreated, so if anyone gives us the slightest sympathy we overreact with our thanks.
H.B. is in the kitchen
Greasing his hair
He guards the space
Against me
He calls it his office
At nine we leave for the hospital

H.B. comes back from the eye dept
Where all my notes are muddled
He says
It's like Romania in there
Two light bulbs
Grimly illuminate
The flaking walls
There is a box of dolls
In the corner
Indescribably grim
The doctor says
Well of course
The kids don't see them
There are no resources
To brighten the place up

My eyes sting from the drops
The infection has halted
The flash leaves
Scarlet after image
Of the blood vessels in my eye

Teeth chattering February
Cold as death
Pushes at the bedsheets
An aching cold
Interminable as marble
My mind
Frosted with drugs ices up
A drift of empty snowflakes
Whiting out memory
A blinkered twister
Circling in spirals
Cross-eyed meddlesome consciousness
Shall I? Will I?
Doodling death watch
Mind how you go

Oral DHPG is consumed by the liver, so they have tweaked a molecule to fool the system. What risk is there? If I had to live forty years blind, I might think twice. Treat my illness like the dodgems: music, bright lights, bumps and throw yourself into life again.
The pills are the most difficult, some taste bitter, others are too large. I'm taking about thirty a day, a walking chemical laboratory. I gag on them as I swallow them and they come up half dissolved in the coughing and the spluttering.

My skins sits on me like the shirt of Nessus. My face irritates, as do my back and legs at night. I toss and turn, scratching, unable to sleep. I get up, turn on the light. Stagger to the bathroom. If I become so tired, maybe I'll sleep. Films chase through my mind. Once in a while I dream a dream as magnificent as the Taj Mahal. I cross southern India with a young spirit guide—India the land of my dreaming childhood. The souvenirs in Moslem's peach and grey living room. Granny called Moselle, called 'Girly,' called May. An orphan who lost her name, which was Ruben. Jade, monkeys, ivory miniatures, mah-jongg. The winds and bamboos of China.

All the old taboos of
Blood lines and blood banks
Blue blood and bad blood
Our blood and your blood
I sit here— you sit there

As I slept a jet slammed into a tower block. The jet was almost empty but two hundred people were fried in their sleep.
The earth is dying and we do not notice it.

A young man frail as Belsen
Walks slowly down the corridor
His pale green hospital pyjamas
Hanging off him
It's very quiet
Just the distant coughing
My jugs eye blots out the
Young man who has just walked past
My field of vision
This illness knocks you for six
Just as you start to forget it
A bullet in the back of my head
Might be easier
You know, you can take longer than
The second world war to get to the grave.
The white flashes you are experiencing in your eyes are common when the retina is damaged.

The damaged retina has started to peel away leaving the innumerable black floaters, like a flock of starlings around in the twilight.

I am back at St Mary’s to have my eyes looked at by the specialist. The place is the same, but there is new staff. How relieved I am not to have the operation this morning to have a tap put into my chest. I must try and cheer up H.B. as he has had a hell of a fortnight. In the
waiting room a little grey man over the way is fretting as he has to
get to Sussex. He says, "I am going blind, I cannot read any longer."

A little later he picks up a newspaper, struggles with it for a moment
and throws it back on the table. My stinging eye-drops have stopped me
reading, so I write this in a haze of belladonna. The little grey man's
face has fallen into tragedy. He looks like Jean Cocteau without the
poet's refined arrogance. The room is full of men and women squinting
into the dark in different states of illness. Some barely able to walk,
distress and anger on every face and then a terrible resignation.

Jean Cocteau takes off his glasses, he looks about him with an
indescribable meanness. He has black slip-on shoes, blue socks, grey
trousers, a Fairisle sweater and a herringbone jacket. The posters that
plaster the walls above him have endless question marks, HIV/AIDS?,
AIDS?, HIV?, ARE YOU INFECTED BY HIV/AIDS?,ARC?, HIV? This is a hard
wait. The shattering bright light of the eye specialist's camera leaves
that empty sky blue after-image. Did I really see green the first time?
The after-image dissolves in a second. As the photographs progress,
colours change to pink and the light turns to orange. The process is a
torture, but the result, stable eyesight, worth the price and the
twelve pills I have to take a day. Sometimes looking at them I fell
nauseous and want to skip them. It must be my association with H.B.,
lover of the computer and king of the keyboard that brought my luck on
the computer which chose my name for this drug trial. I nearly forgot
as I left St Mary's I smiled at Jean Cocteau. He gave a sweet smile
back.

I caught myself looking at shoes in a shop window. I thought of going
in and buying a pair, but stopped myself. The shoes I am wearing at the
moment should be sufficient to walk me out of life.

Yellow
Blue the Color / Poetic Fancy

Blue Bottle buzzing
Lazy days
The sky blue butterfly
Sways on the cornflower
Lost in the warmth
Of the blue heat haze
Singing the blues
Quiet and slowly

Blue of my heart
Blue of my dreams
Slow blue love
Of delphinium days
Blue is the universal love in which man bathes - it is the terrestrial paradise.

The blood of sensibility is blue
I consecrate myself
To find its most perfect expression

One can know the whole world
Without stirring abroad
Without looking out of the window
One can see the way of heaven
The further one goes
The less one knows

In the pandemonium of image
I present you with the universal Blue
Blue an open door to soul
An infinite possibility
Becoming tangible

What do I see
Past the gates of conscience
Activists invading Sunday Mass
In the cathedral
An epic Czar Ivan denouncing the
Patriarch of Moscow
A moon-faced boy who spits and repeatedly
Crosses himself - as he genuflects
Will the pearly gates slam shut in
The faces of the devout

If the doors of perception were cleansed then everything would be seen as it is.

Blue protects white from innocence
Blue drags black with it
Blue is darkness made visible
Blue protects white from innocence
Blue drags black with it
Blue is darkness made visible

Time is what keeps the light from reaching us.

The image is a prison of the soul, your heredity, your education, your vices and aspirations, your qualities, your psychological world.

I have walked behind the sky.
For what are you seeking?
The fathomless blue of Bliss.
To be an astronaut of the void, leave the comfortable house that imprisons you with reassurance.
Remember,

To be going and to have are not eternal - fight the fear that engenders the beginning, the middle and the end.

For Blue there are no boundaries or solutions.

Purple
Memory

I'm walking along the beach in a howling gale -
Another year is passing
In the roaring waters
I hear the voices of dead friends
Love is life that lasts forever.
My heart's memory turns to you
David. Howard. Graham. Terry. Paul...

But what if this present
Were the world's last night
In the setting sun your love fades
Dies in the moonlight
Fails to rise
Thrice denied by cock crow
In the dawn's first light

It started with sweats in the night and swollen glands. Then the black cancer spread across their faces - as they fought for breath TB and pneumonia hammered their lungs, and Toxo at the brain. Reflexes scrambled - sweat poured through hair matter like lianas in the tropical forest. Voices slurried - and then were lost forever. My pen chased this story across the page tossed this way and that in the storm.

I fill this room with the echo of many voices
Who passed time here
Voices unlocked from the blue of the long dried paint

My room has welcomed many summers
Embraced laughter and tears
Can it fill itself with your laughter
Each word a sunbeam
Glancing in the light
This is the song of My Room

As a teenager I used to work for the Royal National Institute for the Blind on their Christmas appeal for radios, with dear miss Punch,
seventy years old, who used to arrive each morning on her Harley Davidson.

She kept us on our toes. Her job as a gardener gave her time to spare in January. Miss Punch Leather Woman was the first out dyke I ever met. Closeted and frightened by my sexuality she was my hope. "Climb on, let's go for a ride." She looked like Edith Piaf, a sparrow, and wore a cock-eyed beret at a saucy angle. She bossed all the other old girls who came back year after year for her company.

How did my friends cross the cobalt river, with what did they pay the ferryman? As they set out for the indigo shore under this jet-black sky - some died on their feet with a backward glance. Did they see Death with the hell hounds pulling a dark chariot, bruised blue-black growing dark in the absence of light, did they hear the blast of trumpets?

David ran home panicked on the train from Waterloo, brought back exhausted and unconscious to die that night. Terry who mumbled incoherently into his incontinent tears. Others faded like flowers cut by the scythe of the Blue Bearded Reaper, parched as the waters of life receded. Howard turned slowly to stone, petrified day by day, his mind imprisoned in a concrete fortress until all we could hear were his groans on the telephone circling the globe.

We all contemplated suicide
We hoped for euthanasia
We were lulled into believing
Morphine dispelled pain
Rather than making it tangible
Like a mad Disney cartoon
Transforming itself into
Every conceivable nightmare

Karl killed himself - how did he do it? I never asked. It seemed incidental. What did it matter if he swigged prussic acid or shot himself in the eye. Maybe he dived into the streets from high up in the cloud lapped skyscrapers.

Impatient youths of the sun
Burning with many colours
Flick combs through hair
In bathroom mirrors
Fucking with fusion and fashion
Dance in the beams of emerald lasers
Mating on suburban duvets
Cum splattered nuclear breeders
What a time that was.

The darkness comes in with the tide
The year slips on the calendar
Your kiss flares
A match struck in the night
Flares and dies
My slumber broken
Kiss me again
Kiss me
Kiss me again
And again
Never enough
Greedy lips
Speedwell eyes
Blue skies

Films chase through my mind. Once in a while I dream a dream as magnificent as the Taj Mahal. I cross southern India with a young spirit guide - India the land of my dreaming childhood. The souvenirs in Moselle's peach and grey living room. Granny called Moselle, called 'Girly,' called May.

Pearl fishers
In azure seas
Deep waters
Washing the isle of the dead
In coral harbours
Amphora
Spill
Gold
Across the still seabed
We lie there
Fanned by the billowing
Sails of forgotten ships
Tossed by the mournful winds
Of the deep
Lost Boys
Sleep forever
In a dear embrace
Salt lips touching
In submarine gardens
Cool marble fingers
Touch an antique smile
Shell sounds
Whisper
Deep love drifting on the tide forever
The smell of him
Dead good looking
In beauty's summer
His blue jeans
Around his ankles
Bliss in my ghostly eye
Kiss me
On the lips
On the eyes
Our name will be forgotten
In time
No one will remember our work
Our life will pass like the traces of a cloud
And be scattered like
Mist that is chased by the
Rays of the sun
For our time is the passing of a shadow
And our lives will run like
Sparks through the stubble.

Aquamarine

Ambiguous/Unclassifiable

Blue flashes in my eyes.

I am a mannish
Muff diving
Size queen
With bad attitude
An arse licking
Psychofag
Molesting the flies of privacy
Balling lesbian boys
A perverted heterodemon
Crossing purpose with death

I am a cock sucking
Straight acting
Lesbian man
With ball crushing bad manners
Laddish nymphomaniac politics
Spunky sexist desires
of incestuous inversion and
Incorrect terminology
I am a Not Gay

I place a delphinium, Blue, upon your grave.
WORKS CITED


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