

**The Representations of HIV/AIDS in Québec Cinema,
1986-1996**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis represents the first comprehensive study of how film was employed in the Canadian province of Québec to reflect upon the AIDS crisis prior to the introduction of combination therapy. Chapter One establishes how the unique threats posed by HIV to the physical and moral integrity of individuals and societies incites potentially divisive reactions that perpetuate harmful understandings of HIV and those it touches. In contrast, the creative medium of film offers a flexible framework for meditation in which the significations of HIV can be explored and confronted constructively and inclusively. Québec, owing to its historical situation, its distinctive and vibrant cinematic heritage and status as a hub for HIV/AIDS-related activity and solidarity, represents a rich microcosm of the different social, political and creative dynamics at play within the AIDS crisis. Chapter Two establishes how documentary can enact objective investigations of the AIDS crisis that methodically deconstruct prevalent misconceptions of HIV and People living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs). These intellectual studies are also juxtaposed with subjective material that evokes the emotional aspects of the crisis. Chapter Three illustrates how testimonial film can catalyse the interrogation by PLWHAs of their relationship with their HIV-positive status. Through the process of filmmaking, PLWHAs can better comprehend the trauma provoked by their status and form friendships and communities built on the discursive and cathartic act of sharing. Chapter Four explains how feature film, exploiting the popular mechanisms of storytelling and characterisation, can bring considerations of HIV to both niche and broader audiences, potentially provoking far-reaching contemplations of the virus. The thesis concludes by summarising how, thanks to its idiosyncratic filmic tradition, Québec's cinematic representations of HIV/AIDS were varied and revealing, questioning and nuancing problematic understandings of HIV and PLWHAs and successfully investigating the AIDS crisis as a local and global phenomenon of human proportions.

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List of Abbreviations

ACT-UP	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
ARC	AIDS-related condition
AZT	Azidothymidine
BBCM	Bad Boy Club Montréal
CCGLM	Centre communautaire des gais et lesbiennes de Montréal
CGMPB	Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau
CMV	Cytomegalovirus
COCQ-SIDA	Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida
C-SAM	Comité sida aide Montréal
CSCM	Commission scolaire catholique de Montréal
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IDU	Intravenous drug users
KS	Kaposi's sarcoma
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans
MSM	Men who have sex with men
NFB	National Film Board of Canada
PCP	Pneumocystis pneumonia
PET	Positron Emission Tomography
PLWHA	Person/people living with HIV/AIDS
PQ	Parti Québécois
SGCQ	Société générale du cinéma québécois

SODEC Société de développement des entreprises culturelles

SOGIC Société générale des industries culturelles

List of Illustrations

- 1 *Mortel désir* : Brothers Ivan and André
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Chapter One: Introduction

Research questions, methodology and existing literature

The twentieth century has been marked by the emergence of several infectious and contagious diseases that were subsequently characterised as health crises, partly due to the multifaceted fears stirred by each outbreak. Arguably, no epidemic aroused more fear than that of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), a seemingly unstoppable virus that causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), a degenerative, potentially fatal disease, whose ability to call into question both physical and moral integrity on an individual and societal level rendered it uniquely terrifying. Indeed, the popular characterisation of the epidemic as 'the AIDS crisis' during the 1980s and 1990s begins to suggest the huge levels of fear generated by the illness. As a new, unfathomable and singularly threatening disease, HIV/AIDS quickly gained a raft of meanings inspired by its symbolic charge. Of great influence upon reactions to HIV/AIDS were the news media, whose coverage of the virus had the power to mould (mis)conceptions of those touched by HIV. In contrast, a range of artistic media, particularly cinema, have been used throughout the crisis by people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs),¹ as well as those working for their cause, to propose and explore alternative, more constructive and more sympathetic understandings of HIV. Whilst the experiences of Western societies with the virus display a degree of similarity, the case of Québec, Canada's francophone province, offers a unique set of circumstances in which the potential relationships between a society, the AIDS crisis and its use of film as a means of mediating the disease can be considered from a fresh perspective. This thesis will investigate two key research questions. Firstly, it will seek to identify to what extent Québec's cinematic responses to HIV in the pre-1996 era were specific to the province and interlinked with internal questions of cultural and national identity. Secondly, and conversely, it will seek to establish how Québec has provided a set of representations of the epidemic that captured with particular intensity a much wider, global

¹ I will use the acronym 'PLWHA' throughout this thesis as the most neutral, inclusive and accurate means possible of referring to those living with different stages of HIV/AIDS.

phenomenon, serving as a microcosm of the myriad questions of fear, identity, societal cohesion, politics and health integral to the AIDS crisis.

This two-pronged approach will allow me to fully explore the relationship between Québec, its film and HIV/AIDS as it was experienced prior to the discovery and widespread introduction of life-saving combination therapy. In considering this relationship from a local perspective, this thesis makes a new contribution to the field of Québec studies, providing the first comprehensive investigation of the ways in which Québec used film to confront one of the most significant health crises of our times and its complex political, social, and emotional fallout. An evaluation of specific societal and cultural reactions and events relating to HIV that emerged across Québec society, particularly in Montréal, establishes Québec's status as a hub for HIV/AIDS-related protest, cultural productivity and activism, and provides the starting point for the central analysis of the representations of HIV/AIDS evident in Québec cinema. The large and varied, yet relatively undiscovered corpus of HIV/AIDS-related Québec cinema, produced in this distinctive set of historical and social circumstances, constitutes a rich, unique and unexplored microcosm of the AIDS crisis that can shed new light on the mediation of HIV/AIDS through the documentary and creative possibilities of film. By comparing and contrasting these filmic representations of HIV/AIDS and PLWHAs, the viewpoints of the filmmakers, and the audiences they seek to address, this thesis will establish the potential advantages of using film to assist a range of implicated parties construct a more positive understanding of the AIDS crisis. It will also clarify the specificity of these representations to the social and cinematic context of Québec, adding new knowledge to the already well-documented field of Québec cinema and its relationship with questions of society, identity, nationalism and marginality.

Building on this analysis of what is specific to Québec's treatment of the phenomenon, the second research question focuses on the character and significance of the province's cinematic representations of HIV/AIDS in the broader, international context of the AIDS crisis, allowing this thesis to also make a new contribution to the field of HIV/AIDS studies. Much Western-focussed HIV/AIDS-related writing considers the political, sociological and cultural impacts of the virus in the context of countries worst affected (in terms of sheer case

numbers) by the virus, including the US, UK and France. By considering internationally-relevant critical texts relating to HIV/AIDS in the context of Québec, this thesis will cast in a new light some of the well-established theories that define this now somewhat dormant field of study, as well as revealing more of the diversity of Western experiences of HIV/AIDS and cultural reflections of the crisis and contributing in particular to the field of HIV/AIDS studies in a broader Canadian context. Thomas Waugh's *The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Queering Sexualities, Nations, Cinemas* provides an invaluable study of the history of representations of queer sexualities in Canadian cinema, both Anglophone and Francophone, including a chapter entitled 'Anti-Retroviral: "A Test of Who We Are"' which explores the ways in which Canadian cinema has used a variety of cinematic genres to confront the AIDS crisis. However, whilst Waugh makes references to Francophone examples of film (some of which are the object of this study), his consideration of the Canadian corpus is distinctly Anglo-centric, focussing principally on the HIV/AIDS-related film to come out of Toronto and Vancouver, cities that have acted as hubs for AIDS activism and cultural productivity throughout the crisis. This study thus seeks to complement Waugh's portrait of Canada's cinematic reactions to HIV/AIDS by close examination of the filmic examples to emerge from Québec and the specificities of their cinematic contribution.

As this thesis seeks to establish a thorough overview of the relationship between Québec society, Québec film and HIV/AIDS, it will principally use a comparative methodology that groups films into distinct families based around genre and that, turn by turn, describes and analyses each film on a case-by-case basis. Such an approach will allow me to identify the similarities and differences of the films both within and between the groupings and to bring to the fore the unique qualities of each grouping. The research focuses chronologically on the period 1986-1996, allowing a depiction of the evolving relationship between Québec, film and HIV/AIDS during the darkest period of the crisis to emerge. Detail of the historical background is strongly evidence-based, drawing on a wide variety of primary sources. This material, principally composed of newspaper articles and film reviews, contextualises the filmic analysis against a vivid backdrop of the realities of the AIDS crisis as it was experienced in Québec,

reinforcing the relevance of both the films to be studied, and the study itself, to the actual position of HIV/AIDS within Québec society during that time.

Employing a single research approach to unpick the complexities and dynamics of the AIDS crisis would risk the misrepresentation of its intricacy and contradictions. The two key research questions to be studied provoke myriad sub-questions that cover a broad range of political, social and emotional themes, implicate a range of human experiences and span overlapping areas of study. Questions relating to fear, stigma, otherness and social control cannot be fully answered without considering those relating to bathhouse culture, safer sex, Québec's treatment of marginal communities, on the one hand, and to the specificities of Québec film and the particularities of cinematic technique on the other. This thesis will thus pursue an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on theories and critiques from a range of fields, in order to best disentangle and analyse the diverse and often intertwined questions involved. The study will therefore appropriately employ and interrogate a variety of ideas and arguments from the spheres of HIV/AIDS studies, philosophy and sociology, Québec studies and film studies.

Analysis of the responses to HIV/AIDS can draw on a substantial range of literature that may broadly be divided into two categories, theoretical texts and engaged, even polemical writing on HIV/AIDS. In the first instance, thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva and Susan Sontag, whose writings have focussed on the societal and psychological mechanisms underpinning human behaviour, offer a range of concepts and paradigms that have been frequently adduced to decipher the emotions that lie at the heart of reactions to the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Foucault's emphasis on the social control of difference and the mechanisms of social and political power are particularly useful in making sense of societal reactions to HIV/AIDS and PLWHAs. Two of his works, *Naissance de la Clinique* and *Histoire de la sexualité : La Volonté de savoir*, are especially helpful in explaining the fears stirred by HIV and by those who carry the virus. In the former, Foucault describes how the development of modern medicine has

ultimately afforded societal authorities a mechanism for social control. By emphasising the importance of good health and the role of medicine and the figure of the doctor as its guarantors, Foucault proposes that societies can be kept in a constant state of nervous agitation, in which citizens become preoccupied by the maintenance of their health and correspondingly fear sources of potential contamination. He paints a distinctly inhuman impression of modern medicine, claiming that doctors and clinicians prioritise the identification and dissection of illness over the wellbeing of the patient. These theories are echoed in *Histoire de la sexualité : La Volonté de savoir*. In this instance, Foucault describes how the labelling of men having sexual relations with other men as 'homosexuals' permits those engaged in activities that go against the grain of heteronormative society to be more readily identified as different and thus troubling, dangerous and candidates for societal control. These ideas resonated strongly with early understandings of the AIDS crisis, a phenomenon that left many scrambling to medicine for recourse against the virus, and additionally promoted the ostracism of those living with the virus for the threat of lethal difference they symbolised to wider society. Foucault's ideas on marginalisation and social control offer a means of considering to what extent the films in my selected corpus entrenched or interrogated the culture of division and fear that so often permeated reactions to HIV/AIDS and those it touched.

In contrast to Foucault's societal focus, the theories of Julia Kristeva can be used to understand the more personally emotive reasons that lie behind the fear of disease and particularly HIV/AIDS. In *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, Kristeva outlines two key ideas of particular interest to this study: the concept of the abject and that of the phobic adult. Kristeva identifies the abject as an amorphous and disturbing phenomenon, involving the collapse of bodily matter, the troubling loss of self-awareness and self-differentiation and the porous viscosity of the boundary between life and death. The abject is thus a site of decomposition at which the self mutates into a terrifying state of repulsive inchoate otherness. Kristeva's idea provides a helpful tool for an understanding of the symbolic charge carried by PLWHAs, people infected by an uncontrollable and degenerative illness, whose horrifying embodiment of living death can be seen as posing a disturbing threat to the integrity and sense of self of the uninfected. Her second

key concept of the phobic adult further illuminates the emotive strength of individual reactions to the disease. She defines the phobic adult as someone who, fear-stricken by an encounter with the abject, frantically uses language to place a protective barrier between themselves and the abject and thus talk away their feelings of revulsion and distress. This linguistic overdrive is characteristic of the press coverage of the AIDS crisis. Going beyond a neutral reporting of events, newspapers used a torrent of emotive, complex and often derogatory language to overlay and thus ultimately neutralise the abject nature of PLWHAs and allay the fears of their readers.² Kristeva's concepts of the abject and the phobic adult provide another set of analytic tools for an in-depth examination of my chosen films.

Susan Sontag, for her part, in *AIDS and its Metaphors*, concentrates on the function and effects of metaphors in the understanding of HIV/AIDS and PLWHAs. Specifically, Sontag outlines and analyses how common representations of HIV/AIDS have regularly employed the metaphor of warfare, a popular trope of contemporary Western societies in the understanding of any illness or apparent external threat, to characterise illnesses as military invaders against whom war can be waged. Certainly, HIV's exploitation and destruction of the body's immune system for its own advancement lend it a ruthless and premeditated character, whilst its evasion of a cure gives the impression of intelligence and a tactical personality. Furthermore, the AIDS-related conditions (ARCs) it can provoke appear to be motivated by a desire to destroy life in as cruel a fashion as possible.³ When used by wider society, the metaphor of warfare equates the unknown phenomenon of HIV/AIDS to a set of pre-established, recognisable images and concepts, providing the general population with a spurious sense of linguistic control over the crisis and temporarily assuaging their fears. However, Sontag critiques the harmful effects of this process on the wellbeing and social position of PLWHAs, who as a result can also be characterised as enemies of a moral majority who are complicit in the spread of

² See Chapter One, p.26.

³ Common ARCs include (but are not limited to) cancers such as Kaposi's sarcoma (KS), pneumocystis pneumonia (PCP), cytomegalovirus (CMV), Cryptococcus, hepatitis C, candidiasis often manifesting as oral thrush, rapid and severe weight loss, extreme fatigue, chronic diarrhoea, fevers and night sweats, organ failure, memory loss, dementia, depression and other neurological disorders.

disease and suffering. Sontag's critique of military metaphor can be readily applied to popular understandings of HIV in Québec's written press, whilst other forms of metaphor have been repeatedly used to assign signification to HIV/AIDS and PLWHAs across a range of commercial and creative media, including the written press, fine art, theatre and literature, as well as cinema. Sontag's exploration of metaphor and its consequences for common understandings of HIV/AIDS and PLWHAs can thus be used to contextualise and interrogate examples of metaphor, military or otherwise, that occur in the films to be studied in this thesis.

In addition to theoretical texts, this study will also refer to works of cultural criticism and critique, that directly or indirectly invoke the theories of Foucault, Kristeva and Sontag in order to engage with the real-life reactions of politicians, public figures, media outlets and the general public to the AIDS crisis and PLWHAs and to propose alternative models for understanding the disease and supporting those it touched. These texts, written in the late 1980s and early 1990s by critics and commentators such as Cindy Patton, Randy Shilts, Leo Bersani, Simon Watney, Paula Treichler and Douglas Crimp, empathise strongly with the situation and causes of PLWHAs and sought to identify more rational, sustainable and positive means of facing HIV/AIDS. They often passionately reflect the writers' anger at the prevailing situation, invariably condemning popular reactions to HIV/AIDS as divisive, discriminatory, judgemental and unconstructive. For example, Cindy Patton has written extensively on many of the negative undercurrents that underpinned reactions to HIV/AIDS, including the fundamental fear of the other, the desire to maintain illusions of societal control and the punishment of marginalised communities by wider society. In *Sex and Germs: The Politics of AIDS* and *Inventing AIDS*, she outlines how overt and covert desires to discriminate against PLWHAs and penalise them for their condition consistently drive the reactions of politicians and key conservative public figures. She also tackles the way scientific discourse, rather than allaying public fears of infection and giving hope to the infected, has helped to justify surveillance and discrimination by encouraging authorities and the general public to both physically and symbolically place PLWHAs under quarantine. Other critiques have aimed above all to expose the bigotry, homophobia and moral judgement

that often lay behind official responses to the AIDS crisis. Randy Shilts, an openly gay American journalist and PLWHA, in *And The Band Played On: Politics, People and the AIDS Epidemic*, an epic piece of investigative journalism, details the unfolding of the AIDS crisis in the US from 1976 to 1987 from a range of different perspectives, including those of scientists, doctors, PLWHAs, activists and politicians.⁴ Based on interviews conducted with real-life prominent actors in the crisis, he shows how some researchers conducting vital investigations into HIV prioritised professional and personal gain over the need to decode the virus and thus discover treatments for PLWHAs, whilst also railing against bodies empowered to fund vital HIV/AIDS research that delayed releasing money for discriminatory reasons. Elsewhere, the sexual aspects of the AIDS crisis provide the primary focus of critiques of popular reactions to HIV/AIDS, as writers seek to make sense of the characterisation of HIV/AIDS as a 'gay' disease. Leo Bersani's *Is the Rectum a Grave?* examines the violent threat of HIV and the demonisation of gay men provoked by the virus and questions the apparent presumptions made by gay men about their own sexuality during the era of AIDS. A more hopeful interpretation of the contemporary climate is offered by Simon Watney, whose *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* encourages gay men to resist anti-sex messages and safely embrace their sexuality in defiant protest against homophobic governments and media. Watney's message is echoed by Douglas Crimp who, in his essay *How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic*, similarly implores gay men to remain sexually active, in spite of the prevailing circumstances, as a means of preserving the solidarity of gay communities worldwide in a time of great loss and sadness.

This thesis will make use of a selection of testimonial literature, also written during the late 1980s and early 1990s, by PLWHAs who sought to record and express their experiences living with the virus as a means of coming to terms with their life situation. Authors of renowned examples of HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature, such as Hervé Guibert, Derek Jarman, Cyril Collard and Alain Emmanuel Dreuilhe, capture the diverse effects of HIV/AIDS on the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of PLWHAs with great poignancy, clarity and

⁴ Shilts's text, one to which I will refer throughout this thesis, is not without its problems. These will be examined in subsequent chapters.

emotive force.⁵ As vital, first-hand accounts of the AIDS crisis, these texts will be used as reference points to investigate the precise nature of the relationship between the cinematic representations of HIV/AIDS and PLWHAs and the real-life experiences they sought to capture and refract. In addition, their inclusion will allow this thesis to construct a fuller picture of the role played by artistic media in all their various forms in the understanding of HIV/AIDS.

Responding to HIV/AIDS

The epidemiological characteristics of HIV/AIDS readily inspire enormous fear for the health of the individual and society. The contagious nature of the virus, coupled with its incurability, the horrifying effects it exerts upon the human body and its connotations of moral deviance deeply disturb our sense of physical and moral integrity and our faith in modern medicine. In the face of such a potentially major threat to the health of both ourselves and society as a whole, it is difficult to remain indifferent. Troubling occurrences elicit responses that demonstrate our interaction with the situation at hand. Responses aimed less at practical solutions than at the public demonstration of action suggest that something must be seen to be done. In her essay 'AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification', Paula Treichler (1988: 31-33) argues that, owing to its specifics as an unknown and threatening phenomenon, AIDS has a particular tendency to elicit a wide range of conflicting responses, as those who fear HIV seek to use any means possible to identify its apparent medical, cultural and historical connotations.⁶ Responding courageously and resolutely to any menacing phenomenon, including HIV/AIDS, can provide reassurance and relief. Conversely, acknowledging the threat and danger it poses can intensify feelings of fear and hysteria.

⁵ For a detailed consideration of HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature, see Chapter Three.

⁶ Treichler's text is the first of several critical texts featured in this thesis to decipher, theorise and evaluate the AIDS crisis from a perspective that foregrounds the experiences of gay men. This recurring focus reflects the ways in which HIV, as it was experienced in the Western world, exerted huge and disproportionate impacts on MSM and particularly gay men and gay culture; a characteristic that, in turn, greatly influenced predominant understandings of HIV. My use of such texts will allow me to principally (though not exclusively) conduct an analysis that is relevant to the lived experiences of this most adversely affected of demographics and to common (mis)conceptions of the virus.

By their very nature, infectious and contagious diseases are necessarily experienced from two broad yet very different perspectives; in the case of HIV/AIDS, either as a PLWHA or as a non-PLWHA. PLWHAs, responding reactively to their diagnosis, seek ways of coming to terms with their condition and of coping with the many difficult physical and emotional experiences entailed in living with HIV/AIDS. Meanwhile, non-PLWHAs focus proactively on the external threats posed by HIV/AIDS to individual and societal health, seeking to better understand and thus to counter them. The vast majority of people across Western societies respond to HIV/AIDS as members of this latter group. Both PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs deploy a variety of response strategies that can be used both positively and negatively to offer practical solutions to the physical implications of HIV and discursive solutions that tackle the emotional and metaphysical implications of the virus. It is the individual's relationship with HIV/AIDS that dictates the orientation of these coping mechanisms and their consequential effect on understandings of the AIDS crisis.

Religion offers one set of response strategies that can be used by PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs as a means of responding to the virus. For some, particularly those living with HIV/AIDS and their friends and family, religious practice may provide a way of confronting and coming to terms with the emotional fallout of living with the disease. Prayer and spirituality can be deployed beneficially to provide comfort, understanding, confidence and a sense of stability to those facing the prospect of an early death and an uncertain future. In contrast, religious discourse, as understood and employed by some non-PLWHAs, can engender an understanding of the virus that fosters discrimination and stigma. A more conservative interpretation of Christian teaching can allow HIV to be interpreted as a form of divine retribution against those leading apparently sinful lifestyles. In the pre-Enlightenment period, Christianity dominated medical discourse and practice. Prior to the development of modern medicine, the knowledge needed to understand illness lay in the hands of God (Foucault, 2009: 56), with deathly phenomena understood as acts of holy intervention or judgement. In the modern world, science has taken the place of religion as the principal practical response to illness. However, moments of crisis and panic can trigger responses that are motivated by emotion rather than rationality. David Caron (2001: 96-99) proposes that many of the socially-constructed meanings of

HIV used to attempt to signify and thus symbolically control the virus simply repackaging existing imagery associated with distasteful, unhygienic and morally questionable maladies past, including those attached particularly to plagues, as well as cholera and tuberculosis. These responses succeeded in inscribing the virus in a long history of marginal, tainted, and therefore socially confined, illnesses. The AIDS crisis did provoke a renaissance in the belief of a causal relation between piety and health; during the 1980s, prominent fundamental Christians and Conservatives in the US used the Bible to cast the phenomenon as divine retribution against those leading corrupt lives and thus to justify the judgement and isolation of PLWHAs. Polls conducted throughout the decade in the US consistently reported that around half of Americans believed the AIDS crisis to be a 'punishment for the decline in moral standards' (Singer and Rogers, 1991: 14). Such responses are evocative of Foucault's conception of 'the homosexual', a reductive identity perpetuated by society as a means of facilitating and justifying the surveillance and control of gay men (Foucault, 1976: 58-59). Urges to propagate gay stereotypes were heightened by HIV, a virus that doubled the threat posed by men who have sex with men (MSM) to the health and wholeness of the moral majority. This group's use of strict religious discourse as a response to HIV/AIDS permitted them to comprehend HIV as an affliction limited to homogenous groups of threatening 'others' and thus to assuage their fears of the virus with a false sense of certainty. In turn, their responses can justify the scapegoating and shunning of the infected as threats to health and morality.

The practice and discourse of science offer PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs another framework in which HIV/AIDS can be confronted. The use of modern medicine as a practical response to the AIDS crisis can exert hugely positive effects on the physical and emotional wellbeing of PLWHAs.⁷ Governmental responses to the AIDS crisis across the Western world have taken the form of policy that focusses principally on funding the development and provision of effective medication. Scientific research has allowed many of the lethal effects of HIV to be suppressed, thus making 'full-blown' AIDS in some Western countries almost unheard of, whilst ongoing research is allowing scientists to edge closer

⁷ These positive effects can of course be reaped only by PLWHAs who are able to access the required forms of medicine.

to establishing a form of functional cure (Gallagher, 2013). In the meantime, science continues to perfect combination therapy, reducing the quantities of antiretroviral drugs taken by a PLWHA to potentially just one pill per day (United Kingdom, National Health Service, 2014). These advances can offer PLWHAs the prospect of a healthy and stable future in which they can live as fully as anyone else.

Today, PLWHAs using combination therapy arguably have many reasons to be grateful for scientific research. However, during the early years of the AIDS crisis, the relationship between PLWHAs and the medical profession was characterised by strain and mistrust. In *And The Band Played On: Politics, People and the AIDS Epidemic*, Randy Shilts (2007: 366-67, 460-61) focusses particularly upon the rivalry that existed between the Centre for Disease Control and the National Cancer Institute, two US organisations at the centre of global efforts to identify and decipher AIDS, with infighting between researchers at the two institutions preventing co-operation and thus hindering the identification of HIV as the cause of AIDS, necessary to begin working towards the discovery of effective treatments. Shilts (2007: 150) also describes how, during the early years of the crisis, when HIV/AIDS was known as Gay-Related Immune Deficiency, hospitals were reluctant to admit too many ailing MSM for fear of tainting their reputation. He does also provide extensive evidence of the dedication of doctors and medical professionals to their patients. However, such highly public instances of disagreement between influential researchers coupled with an apparent reluctance by some hospitals to treat PLWHAs were interpreted by many as a sign of the medical profession's complicity in the spread of HIV/AIDS, or at the very least as a sign of their shaky commitment to the symptoms and concerns of their HIV-positive patients.

The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) is an international activist group that campaigns for the rights of PLWHAs. Originating in New York, the group rose in prominence throughout the 1980s and 1990s and demonstrated the sense of anger felt towards some parts of the scientific industry and also towards governments that were perceived as being indifferent, judgemental and even complicit in the deaths of PLWHAs. Their strength also shows the collective will of those touched by HIV/AIDS to compel those with the financial and political power to speed up AIDS research and to do more to help those in need. The

arguments and perspective of ACT-UP resonate with Foucault's representation of clinicians as figures of authority who, for the sake of identifying the characteristics and workings of disease and infections, subject patients to multiple levels of surveillance, control and even humiliation (Foucault, 2009: 124-31). Traces of Foucault's theory can be seen in Cindy Patton's critique of science-based responses to HIV, which she deconstructs as justification for the enforcement of discriminatory surveillance of already marginalised people.⁸ Foucault's vision of the medical profession, it is true, pays little attention to the tangible benefits that modern medicine has given humankind. In the context of the AIDS crisis, the extreme difficulties of the context in which health professionals were working with HIV/AIDS must also be acknowledged. Health professionals were often as powerless to treat AIDS as their patients were, with compassionate and dedicated doctors and researchers on the front line of the crisis experiencing great levels of stress and frustration at the elusiveness of effective treatments. However, what the existence of ACT-UP does suggest is the limitations and problems of using science alone to confront HIV/AIDS offensively. Using hard medicine as the sole means of responding to the AIDS crisis crucially lacks the emotional engagement needed to understand the very significant human and social aspects of the crisis.

Science can also be used by non-PLWHAs to both positive and negative effect. The twentieth-century successes of researchers in disease control would suggest that, at some point, HIV too will fall under the control of medicine. An unflinching belief in medicine based on the precedent set by modern science thus provides a comforting sense of reassurance. However, unproblematic reliance on medicine and its discourses can foster misunderstanding as easily as responses founded upon religion and morality. Approaching HIV exclusively as a question of disease control can ignore the very significant emotional consequences of the disease on individual patients. The overuse of medical discourse can allow the uninfected to perceive PLWHAs as carriers of illness requiring quarantine and surveillance, outcomes that evoke a Foucauldian vision of medical discourse as

⁸ 'The effectiveness of science-logic in policing society has both reified science-logic and inured us to science's inability to solve the problems it sets for itself. The categories of science, especially the conjuncture of epidemiology and virology, have placed a barely invisible *cordon sanitaire* around minority communities, "deviant" individuals, and around the entire continent of Africa' (Patton, 1990: 99).

a means of justifying discriminatory surveillance of individuals. Evidence of the effects of an excessive medicalisation of the AIDS crisis can be observed in contemporary public opinion. In 1985, a poll conducted by *The Los Angeles Times* suggested a majority of Americans favoured the quarantine of PLWHAs (Balzar, 1985). A range of written accounts suggest the sense of rejection experienced by PLWHAs who felt treated by health professionals, the health industry and the general public as test subjects and clinical nuisances rather than ill and dying human beings in need of care and compassion. Both religion and science demonstrate similarities when used as frameworks to respond to HIV/AIDS. When used reactively by PLWHAs, as a means of dealing with their condition, the practical applications of religion and science can potentially permit greater mental and physical wellbeing. However, when used proactively by non-PLWHAs, as defence mechanisms, the discourse of both religion and science can foster problematic understandings of the AIDS crisis that can inadvertently or deliberately be used to cast blame on PLWHAs and justify discrimination against them.

Rhetorical responses to HIV/AIDS constitute another set of strategies with which to confront the disease. Unlike religion and science, these strategies are based entirely upon the production of speech as a means of giving meaning to the AIDS crisis. As was the case with religion and science, rhetorical responses can be used reactively by PLWHAs and proactively by non-PLWHAs to both positive and negative effect. One such rhetorical tactic involves using anthropomorphism as a means of making sense of HIV. In *AIDS and its Metaphors*, Susan Sontag (1991a: 91-97) outlines the effects, both positive and negative, of the metaphor of warfare on common conceptions of HIV/AIDS, from the perspectives of PLWHAs and the uninfected. When used reactively by PLWHAs, military metaphor can produce both positive and negative outcomes. Equating the AIDS crisis to a military battle allows for the phenomenon of HIV/AIDS, one whose unpredictability was matched by its unfamiliarity, to reassuringly resemble other crises (military or otherwise) which can be fought and overcome. Conversely, however, likening HIV to an invader could strengthen the perception of the virus as a force of relentless destruction, thus overwhelming a PLWHA with feelings of defeat.

However, when used proactively by non-PLWHAs to understand HIV, the military metaphor can exert predominantly negative effects. Though the impression of confrontation may provide society with short-term relief from the stresses provoked by the disturbing nature of HIV/AIDS, it can also promote negative characterisation of PLWHAs to the detriment of their emotional and physical wellbeing. Sontag argues specifically that military metaphor permits those who carry disease to be portrayed as complicit in the spread of illness and suffering.⁹ She further explains how the demonisation of the sick is even more prevalent in the AIDS crisis, where HIV exerts long-term, transformative effects on PLWHAs and thus demarcates them as physically and morally different and undesirable (Sontag, 1991a: 124-27). Public awareness campaigns produced during the 1980s demonstrate the potency of metaphor as a tool to give HIV/AIDS meaning. The UK campaign released in 1986 under the government of Margaret Thatcher entitled 'AIDS: don't die of ignorance' used imagery that likened HIV to an erupting volcano and an enormous, foreboding tombstone, whilst a voiceover explicitly defined AIDS as 'a threat to us all'. Arguably, advertisements such as these sought to educate a public that required information relating to HIV. However, the use of threatening and aggressive imagery, that was striking but also simplistic, promoted the use of metaphor as a form of shorthand reference to the virus over a real consideration of its wider-reaching societal and emotional implications and the necessary contemplation of mortality, infection, powerlessness, sexuality, grief and loss. The use of rhetorical responses recalls Julia Kristeva's notion of the phobic adult, a figure who employs extensive and ultimately trivial speech to skim over and avoid their fears of bodily impermanence and dissolution (Kristeva, 1980: 52-53). By talking tritely around their concerns, the phobic adult evades consideration of the root causes of their worries. In *And the Band Played On*, Shilts (2007: 315) evokes the figure of the phobic adult through his documentation of 'AIDSpeak', a form of jargon-based language used by politicians, health officials and activists as a means of publicly discussing AIDS without ever having to mention any of its grittier and more troubling details.

⁹ 'The metaphor [of war-making] implements the way particularly dreaded diseases are envisaged as an alien "other", as enemies are in modern war; and the move from the demonization of the illness to the attribution of fault to the patient is an inevitable one, no matter if patients are thought of as victims. Victims suggest innocence. And innocence, by the inexorable logic that governs all relational terms, suggests guilt' (Sontag, 1991a: 97).

Kristeva's notion of the phobic adult critically addresses the use of metaphor and other rhetorical responses as a means to avoid full confrontation of the reality of HIV/AIDS, a phenomenon that strongly threatens our sense of physical and mental wholeness. In the context of the AIDS crisis, the figure of the phobic adult can represent both the uninfected individual who fears contamination and illness and the infected individual who fears rejection, disintegration and death.

Stereotypes constitute another rhetorical response to the AIDS crisis that can assuage the fears of non-PLWHAs. These figures exaggerate the perceived characteristics of those touched by HIV in order to create derogatory caricatures of PLWHAs. When interpreted as being representative of all PLWHAs, these reductive stereotypes allow those afraid of HIV to mitigate their fears of the threats posed by the virus and their corresponding desire for certitude (Patton, 1990: 106-07). These attitudes moreover are not restricted to heterosexual populations. Much anecdotal evidence also documents the perpetuation of negative stereotypes of PLWHAs amongst gay men themselves throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Such stereotypes would define some MSM PLWHAs as being extra-promiscuous and extra-risky, allowing more conservative gay men to feel safe from infection (Shilts, 2007: 226). The stereotyping of gay PLWHAs by gay men is potentially surprising, suggesting that all those who are uninfected, *including* uninfected members of those demographics worst affected by the virus, are equally capable of employing counterproductive rhetoric as a response strategy to the threat of HIV/AIDS.

Denial of the AIDS crisis constitutes another form of rhetorical defence against HIV. Those belonging to the movement of AIDS denialism refute the evidence that demonstrates HIV's status as the cause of AIDS. High-profile examples of AIDS-denialists include world-renowned biologist Peter Duesberg and South African President Thabo Mbeki, whose denial of the AIDS crisis during the 2000s had very real and damaging effects on South Africa's HIV/AIDS policy and infection and survival rates. The denial of HIV/AIDS can operate on scientific, political and personal levels. Working on the assumption that a threat exists only through its acknowledgement, those afraid of HIV (both the infected and the uninfected) may simply choose to ignore the virus and its implications altogether. A reaction to HIV/AIDS inspired by silence may initially seem the antithesis of the rhetorical approaches that use different forms of language to inspire feelings of

safety. However, the logic of denial is ultimately just as successful as the active creation of dialogue in deploying response strategies that purposely avoid a true confrontation with HIV/AIDS and the disturbing personal and societal questions that the condition raises.

The variety of response strategies to HIV/AIDS considered above demonstrates the complexity of the emotions that the virus can provoke and the very different perspectives from which they can be experienced. The practical applications of religion and medicine can be employed reactively by PLWHAs as a means of effectively coping with the difficult emotional and medical situations in which they find themselves. The rhetorical response of metaphor can also be used by PLWHAs to promote feelings of optimism. However, these responses can also leave them feeling alienated from the processes of clinical treatment and research and propagate feelings of defeat. When used proactively by non-PLWHAs, the various response strategies produce outcomes that are frequently problematic. The discursive applications of both religion and science can provide short-term emotional relief from the fears posed by HIV/AIDS, but they can also foster the discrimination and scapegoating of PLWHAs. There will be, however, non-PLWHAs whose compassion for the ill and the dying is greater than their fear of HIV and whose responses to the virus will favour the societal inclusion of PLWHAs as opposed to their exclusion. Individual attitudes towards HIV/AIDS are highly subjective and dependent on personal background, experiences and beliefs. Furthermore, attitudes to any source of fear can easily shift over time. What the existence and apparent prevalence of problematic and potentially damaging response strategies demonstrate is the power of the fear stirred by HIV/AIDS to elicit responses that forego rationality in order to instil any feeling of safety.

HIV/AIDS, Canada and Québec: facts, figures and historical and cultural context

The discussion of response strategies to the AIDS crisis has so far been pursued in general terms. Considering the virus in the context of the Western world has enabled an efficient summary of some of the major issues of the AIDS crisis in societies that demonstrate similarities in their affected demographics, wealth and

associated treatment options. At the same time, this broad approach has overlooked the specificities of the particular societies in which they are played out. Communities that are devout may favour religious readings of the AIDS crisis, whilst secular communities may favour a more scientific approach. Levels of prosperity, tolerance and cohesion as dictated by a society's history will colour attitudes towards illness, death and the marginalised. Much of the writing that documents the history of the AIDS crisis and its responses has however been Anglophone and has concentrated on the virus in the context of the US. This focus is justified by the staggering toll that the virus took on American society; of all Western nations, the US has witnessed the most AIDS-related deaths and has been heavily involved with the illness from its outset as it emerged rapidly and in epidemic proportions amongst MSM populations of liberal cities such as San Francisco, New York and Miami. By 1990, AIDS cases in the country numbered 160,000 and AIDS deaths numbered 120,000. By the mid-2000s, over 500,000 AIDS-related deaths had been recorded (The American Foundation for AIDS Research, 2011).

However, the US is not the only North American society to have been implicated in the AIDS crisis. The experiences of Canada, and in particular those of Québec, cannot be unproblematically elided with those of their southern neighbour. In comparison to the US, the toll taken by HIV/AIDS on human life (at least in terms of pure numbers) has been far smaller. Data concerning AIDS-related deaths is collected not by the Québec provincial government but by the federal Public Health Agency of Canada. In 2014, the agency published a report entitled *HIV and AIDS in Canada – Surveillance Report to December 31, 2013* that noted a total of 14,381 deaths caused by AIDS across the whole of Canada between 1980 and 2013 (Canada, Public Health Agency, 2014: 68).¹⁰ Canadian data also testifies to the effectiveness of combination therapy in halting HIV. The number of AIDS-related deaths across Canada peaked in 1995 at just over 1,400 per year. After this high, the death rate dropped sharply, standing at less than

¹⁰ Since its emergence, HIV has caused the deaths of 35 million people worldwide, with 1.1 million of these deaths occurring in 2015 alone (World Health Organization, 2016). The number of HIV-related deaths in Canada thus represents less than 0.05% of the global total. The data demonstrates that, whilst the mortality caused by AIDS in Canada constituted a fraction of that witnessed globally, the total number of those who died nationally is not insignificant.

200 in 1999 (Canada, Public Health Agency, 2000). This data is consistent with the emergence of life-saving combination therapy in 1996.

How many of Canada's 14,381 AIDS-related deaths occurred in Québec cannot be ascertained. The Québec provincial government does however collect data regarding the number of PLWHAs who reside in the province. Estimations for the year 2011 suggested a total of around 19,300 people across Québec who were HIV-positive (Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2013: 55). In a province whose population stands at around 8 million, the number of PLWHAs in Québec is therefore relatively small, yet not unimportant. The Québec government also compiles data relating to the demographics involved in new diagnoses of HIV (Québec, Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux, 2013: 58). With regard to women, 708 new diagnoses of HIV were made amongst women during the period 2002-2012. Of these cases, 45% were amongst women who had migrated to Québec from areas where HIV is endemic, these being sub-Saharan Africa and Haiti. 19% were amongst heterosexual women having sex with high-risk partners and 17% were amongst intravenous drug users (IDUs). With regard to men, the same document reports 3,245 new diagnoses over the same period. 70% of these cases occurred amongst MSM, whilst 8% were amongst men who had migrated to Québec from countries where HIV is endemic and 7% of cases were amongst IDUs. Data relating to HIV diagnoses in Québec is unavailable for the period prior to 2002. However, the figures related to national death rates provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada (2014: 72) mirror the trends seen in Québec as described above. During the period 1980-2013, 73% of Canada's AIDS-related deaths occurred amongst MSM. 7% were amongst IDUs, 5% were amongst heterosexuals having sex with high-risk partners and 5% were amongst those who had migrated to Canada from endemic countries. Finally, 4% were amongst MSM+IDUs. Statistics for nation-wide AIDS-related deaths and province-wide HIV diagnoses therefore show that the demographics principally and disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS in both Québec and Canada are:

- MSM
- MSM+IDUs

- IDUs
- Immigrants from countries where HIV is endemic
- Heterosexuals having sex with high-risk partners (any of the four demographics listed above)

Newspaper coverage from the era also indicates that, in Québec, HIV was particularly concentrated in Montréal, by far the province's largest and most significant urban conurbation. In late 1994, 76% of Québec's 3,171 confirmed cases of AIDS were identified on the island of Montréal (Bellemare, 1994). Therefore, as was the case in many Western societies, HIV/AIDS in Québec was a strongly, though not exclusively, urban phenomenon. This rudimentary analysis of relevant and available data has shown that, broadly speaking, the demographics affected by HIV/AIDS in Québec are representative of those affected nationwide across Canada. MSM are by far the demographic that has been the most infected and killed by HIV/AIDS in both Québec and Canada. IDUs (who are both MSM and non-MSM) and immigrants from countries where HIV is endemic are the two other key demographics that have been disproportionately affected. The figures show, however, that HIV is not a virus confined exclusively to people engaging in homosexual sex, but that heterosexuals are also implicated. The potential ramifications of these statistics for the responses to the AIDS crisis in Québec are problematic. The fact that HIV is a virus that has principally struck the province's marginalised populations increases the likelihood of HIV being read as a divisive and stigmatising issue strongly connected to marginality and sexuality, and of PLWHAs being perceived as a threat to social and moral integrity. This approach may favour the deployment of ostracising response strategies that use certain forms of discourse and rhetoric to provide the uninfected with a sense of relief and safety.

The importance of Québec's specific relationship with HIV/AIDS becomes even more acute when considered in the context of the province's history, identity and culture. Specifically, Québec's unique socio-political and socio-cultural history has given rise to a community narrative that stresses the vulnerability of its societal integrity and the threat of linguistic and cultural contamination. Today, Québec is one of the ten provinces of Canada, with a largely Francophone

population of some 8 million, just under a quarter of the total Canadian population (c. 36.1 million). The continuing existence of a Francophone enclave in the North East of the North American continent is all that remains of *la Nouvelle France*, France's once-great presence there. Claimed for the mother country by Jacques Cartier in 1534 on his arrival on the Gaspé Peninsula, *la Nouvelle France* acquired full colonial status with the founding of Québec City in 1608 by Samuel de Champlain and of Montréal in 1642 by Paul de Chomedey and Jeanne Mance. France's command over the North American continent came to an end just over a hundred years later with the defeat of Montcalm's French Army by the British forces of General Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham in Québec City in 1759. The signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1763 established British rule over all areas formerly held by France, including the Saint Lawrence Valley, an area that became known as the Province of Quebec. Whilst the British quickly sought to assert their dominance over the former communities of *la Nouvelle France*, they were obliged by their lack of French and their limited personnel to make some concessions to the Francophone inhabitants. Under the Quebec Act (1774), Francophones were allowed to use their mother tongue, to practice Catholicism and to employ their own Civil Code, thus ensuring the survival of a Francophone, Catholic enclave in Anglophone North America.

For the Francophones, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were characterised by the struggle to preserve their French identity and culture. Seeking to resolve conflict between Francophones and British Loyalists, newly arrived as a result of the American Revolution, the Constitutional Act of 1791 formed the provinces of Upper Canada (modern-day Ontario) and Lower Canada (modern-day Québec), each with its own elected House of Representatives. However, both houses were subject to the British Crown as represented by the Governor of the colony and his appointed legislative and executive councils. In 1839, following rebellions in both Upper and Lower Canada, Lord Durham published the *Report on the Affairs of British North America*, proposing, as a solution to the continuing state of unrest, the uniting of the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada into a single Province of Canada, whose leaders would be granted greater devolutionary power. Durham's recommendations took the form of the 1840 Act of Union, an act that, to the Francophone residents of Lower Canada, represented an assault on their culture and history, not least because

English was decreed therein as the only official language of the new Province. By 1848, this provision had however been repealed and the British North America Act (1867) created the Dominion of Canada, a country formed of four provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Québec), each with total control over its domestic affairs and founded upon co-existence of the British and the French as two founding nations.¹¹ Keen to maintain its influence over French Canadian society, the Catholic Church quickly strengthened its grip over education, health and welfare.

Moving into the twentieth century, Québec continued to be caught between the search for greater autonomy and the maintenance of the status quo. Conscription in 1917 and 1942 angered many French Canadians who felt little loyalty to the British Crown and highlighted the enormous differences between Anglophones and Francophones in relation to identity and allegiances. As the century progressed, it also became apparent that, in comparison to Ontario, its Anglophone counterpart, French Canadian society in Québec increasingly appeared underdeveloped and backward. Whilst Ontario embraced modernity to become an increasingly industrialised and prosperous society, Québec, though also industrialising, remained tied to its agrarian and devoutly Catholic roots, with its apparent reluctance to change with the times epitomised by the philosophy and policy of Maurice Duplessis, the leader of the Union Nationale party and Premier of Québec between 1936-1939 and 1944-1959. Duplessis favoured the development of Québec's agriculture over the potential of its towns and cities, considered by him as places of vice and moral corruption. All aspects of health, education and welfare continued to be overseen by the Catholic Church, ensuring the dominant place of religion in daily life and the maintenance of traditional, conservative values. However, the climate of the post-war era left many Québeckers seeking a new vision for their province. Duplessis' death in 1959 led to the election of Jean Lesage and his Liberal party on a manifesto that promised to begin the process of modernisation and to bring an end to the period known as *la Grande noirceur*. Provincial elections held in 1960, 1966, 1968 and 1970 (won by Jean Lesage, Daniel Johnson Sr., Jean-Jacques Bertrand and Robert

¹¹ Control over legislative and international affairs was not fully granted to Canada until the Canadian Constitution was repatriated in 1982; an event that has still not been ratified by Québec.

Bourassa respectively) consistently gave power to leaders promising economic and political reform, moving Québec rapidly away from its image as a parochial, primarily rural society towards a truer version of its modern self as an increasingly urban and secular community. These changes, commonly referred to as *la Révolution tranquille*, were partly effected by the creation of a new societal and political framework based not in the Church but in the state, with successive governments creating the workings of a modern society including state-owned industries, education and healthcare systems.

The 1960s and 1970s also witnessed the fruition of a range of social movements that mobilised marginalised demographics to achieve greater rights and societal recognition. In conjunction with Québec's modernisation (and with the international movement of second-wave feminism), women and women's organisations campaigned for issues including the right to abortion, access to education, childcare and paid maternity leave. Organisations such as the Fédération des femmes du Québec and the Conseil du statut de la femme gave institutional form to the organised and effective action taken by both Québécois women and the provincial government to achieve greater equality in a latently conservative, patriarchal society. The sexual revolution of the 1960s also began to foster a climate in which queer Montrealers could congregate, socialise and build a visible cultural and intellectual scene. Gay-friendly establishments including bars, clubs and saunas began to assemble in the downtown area around Rue Stanley and, in 1969, same-sex acts were decriminalised by federal law across Canada. Writers such as Michel Tremblay and Marie-Claire Blais began producing prominent and successful works of literature and theatre that featured gay, lesbian and queer characters, whilst the distribution of such creative works was supported by a strong network of cultural spaces as typified by the L'Androgyne bookstore which, opening in 1973, became an institution of queer Montréal (Lafontaine, 2002). The increasing visibility of Montréal's queer population was also politically motivated. Called to action in part by New York's Stonewall riots in 1969, queer Montrealers began organising themselves formally in the early 1970s to seek their own emancipation through the distribution of periodicals (including early titles such as *Mainmise* and *Le Tiers*) and the formation of liberation groups (such as Front de libération homosexuel in 1971, university-based Gay McGill in 1972 and the Front homosexuel québécois de

libération in 1974) (Higgins, 1999: 112-20). These cultural, social and political developments raised the profile and positive visibility of Montréal's queer population and placed their city on the map of North American cities renowned for hosting (relatively) safe havens of tolerance and diversity.

In spite of these victories, homophobia remained ingrained across many of Québec's provincial institutions and much of its society. At the behest of Mayor Jean Drapeau, police raids of queer establishments were particularly common in Montréal throughout the 1970s, with officers using bawdy house legislation to justify beatings and mass arrests and threatening patrons with the humiliation of being outed publicly. These interventions occurred especially in the run-up to the 1976 Olympic Games, with Drapeau seeking to clear the downtown area of marginal activities in preparation for the scrutiny of international visitors. This resulted ultimately in the exodus of queer establishments to the Eastern section of Rue Sainte-Catherine, an area known today as the gay Village (*le Village gai*). In October 1977, a particularly brutal police raid of the Truxx Bar inspired 2,000 people to protest against the ongoing state-sanctioned repression of queer Montrealers. In response, the Québec government became the first jurisdiction in North America to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, adding this clause to the province's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms in 1977.

In conjunction with the social and institutional changes associated with *la Révolution tranquille*, the development of nationalist sentiments took hold. Québec's shortcomings were painted by nationalists as the result of the province's subservience to the dictates of the federal government and apparent repression at the hands of Ottawa. This was supported by a perception of the history of Francophones in North America, characterised by defeat and control at the hands of the British. As a result, Québec nationalists eschewed the traditional idea of *le Canada français*, encompassing French Canadians throughout the whole of Canada, to promote the ideal of *le Québec*, a unilingual Francophone society spatially defined by the geographical limits of the province and distinct from the *Anglophonie* by which it was surrounded. The desire to achieve collective emancipation from what was perceived as Anglophone control crystallised in 1976 in the election of the Parti Québécois (PQ) led by René Lévesque, whose goal was to renegotiate Québec's relationship with the rest of Canada and achieve a form of sovereignty. Lévesque's philosophy evoked the

need to protect the cultural, economic and spiritual integrity of Québec from forces (implicitly Anglophone and federal) that could interfere with and contaminate the self-fulfilment and destiny of Québec (Lévesque, 1968). Lévesque's desire for independence became manifest in the first referendum on sovereignty in May 1980. However, only 40% of voters chose to give the PQ a mandate to negotiate Québec independence, and the failure of the referendum concretised the metaphorical crossroads at which Québec found itself during the 1980s. On the surface, it had appeared that Québec was fully prepared to embrace the political emancipation for which many of its residents had long been yearning and to assume its own distinct identity as an independent society. For those who desired sovereignty, the referendum's defeat signified yet one more loss in a centuries-long fight for greater recognition and autonomy and a continuation of Québec's historic subordination to Anglophone forces. The majority of those who rejected the offer of Lévesque's referendum, on the other hand, saw Québec's ambitions as a modern, secular society as most effectively achievable as a distinctive province within the Canadian federation, or else they were part of a conservative backlash that preferred the security of the status quo to the unpredictability of an independent future. The Constitution Act, introduced in 1982 by the federal government to repatriate Canada's constitution from Westminster, subsequently added further insult to Québec's sense of injury. Whilst all of Canada's other provinces approved the terms of the Act, Québec remained unsatisfied, fearing that it permitted a greater centralisation of federal government and a weakening of its own rights and powers. The eventual passing of the Act by the other provinces without Québec's consent symbolised to Québeckers Anglophone Canada's disrespect for Québec's right to self-definition and autonomy, with the issue remaining an unresolved irritant to this very day.

The emergence of HIV/AIDS in Québec in 1982 thus coincided with a society-wide sense of dysfunctionality and uncertainty and with a loss of momentum and direction in Québec's vision of its present and its future. The emancipatory socio-political and socio-economic gains of the 1960s had been matched on the individual front by accelerated and radical changes in sexual politics. These changes placed Québec at the forefront not only of women's rights, but also those of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) populations. With the advent of AIDS, these hard-won freedoms were suddenly thrown into

question by a deadly and apparently uncontrollable disease. The political, social and cultural spheres of Québec had been dominated from the mid-century onwards by a rhetoric that focussed principally upon the destiny and integrity of Québec society and its vulnerability in the face of external forces. This rhetoric, motivated by the desire for self-defence against entities perceived as threats, shared striking similarities with the predominant proactive response strategies used against HIV/AIDS, responses that similarly sought to instil feelings of safety by isolating and overcoming potential sources of harm and anxiety. Reactions to the illness reflected the divisions and contradictions of conservative and liberal opinion within Québec society, as revealed by the referendum. For conservative traditionalists, still influenced by the stance of the Catholic Church, and committed in general to the maintenance of the status quo, the threat posed by this hitherto unknown and lethal illness readily aroused emotive issues of morality and deviance from religious and social norms, thus prompting response strategies based on condemnation, scapegoating and avoidance. Even the more progressively-minded, already shaken by the collapse of a cherished political dream, may have felt their confidence severely tested and, yielding to old but still latent prejudice, have sought reassurance in familiar, insular ideas. The AIDS crisis was an unfamiliar and disturbing phenomenon that further troubled societal cohesion by bringing marginalised sexualities and their supposed dangers to the fore. The phenomenon may therefore have been met by a Québécois society whose openness to the progressive values of social plurality and acceptance of difference was more limited than its public image had suggested. Arguably, this may have left the province's minorities exposed to ostracism and recrimination, and its general public prey to the scaremongering and misinformation prevalent in the media.

The response strategies to the AIDS crisis used by the Québec press

An examination of contemporary press coverage of the AIDS crisis in Québec reveals how different response strategies to HIV were employed and disseminated across Québec society by different news outlets to their different readerships. The role played by the press in the formation of public opinion is of course problematic. Its main function is to inform society of significant happenings

that occur both domestically and internationally. The emergence of HIV during the 1980s and 1990s was undoubtedly a significant global event of far-reaching consequence. In an era that preceded rolling news channels and the internet, the written press played a vital role in keeping the world informed of the crisis and distributing the information that societies needed to respond to HIV as effectively as possible. However, the role of the press as a mediator between events and the general public is one that raises questions of credibility and subjectivity. Cindy Patton criticises all media outlets for relaying developments relating to HIV/AIDS to the general public in such a way as to exaggerate the sense of distance between non-PLWHAs and PLWHAs and thus perpetuate the divisive dynamic of “self” and “other” that largely defined popular reactions to the AIDS crisis (Patton, 1985: 21). Newspapers are commercial enterprises that are ultimately motivated by the creation of profit and seek thus to print products that will garner the largest audiences possible. In his study of the British press’s reactions to the AIDS crisis, Simon Watney (1987: 82-83) identifies how tabloid newspapers, appealing to traditional, heterosexual families in order to stay profitable, afforded little room to mediations of the AIDS crisis that did not adhere to a code of rigid, heteronormative moral expectations, which MSM touched by AIDS had little chance of meeting. Given the degree of similarity that united Western experiences of HIV, it would not be surprising to observe newspapers in other heteronormative, Judeo-Christian societies elsewhere adopting similar, moralising stances on the AIDS crisis and the marginalised nature of the demographics it principally touched. The newspaper format may in itself also have limited the breadth and depth of its representations of the AIDS crisis provided. Constrained by time and space, journalists covering news on a day-to-day basis may have tended to produce reactions to HIV that were too brief and quickly created to reflect fully on the diverse implications of the virus.

In Québec, press coverage of the AIDS crisis was extensive and highly varied and can be usefully examined to comprehend some of the many repercussions of the virus felt across all areas of Québec society. The Archives gaies du Québec, located in Montréal’s gay Village on Rue Amherst, provide a vast resource of articles on all aspects of the AIDS crisis published by all of Montréal’s major newspapers from the early 1980s to the present day. The

Archives also hold a variety of other publications and paraphernalia, including LGBT-focussed titles such as *Fugues*, campaign material produced by ACT-UP and LGBT film festival programmes and reviews. The newspaper articles took a range of forms, with conventional articles, front-page spreads, editorials, opinions, scientific reports and cultural pieces all equally evident.

The Montréal daily press is vibrant, diverse and spans political and linguistic spectrums. *Le Journal de Montréal* is a centre-right tabloid that often reports on events in a sensationalist manner. *La Presse* is a daily Francophone broadsheet that appeals to the middle classes. It is the main competitor to *Le Journal de Montréal*, and offers views that are best described as centrist. *Le Devoir* is an independent Francophone broadsheet with a higher-brow audience than that of *La Presse*. In terms of higher-calibre Anglophone publications, *The Gazette* is a broadsheet that stands out as Montréal's only English daily. The publication was founded in 1778, making it a bastion of the Québec press. In spite of their diversity, all of the major publications of the Québec press shared one common trait in their coverage of the AIDS crisis. This chapter's discussion of response strategies to HIV/AIDS highlighted the fundamental division between the types of reaction deployed by those living with HIV and those who do not. In seeking to identify with as wide an audience as possible, all of Montréal's daily newspapers broadly responded to HIV during the 1980s and 1990s from the perspective of a non-PLWHA. Resonating with Watney's analysis of the British press, this stance impacted greatly on the types of response strategies evident in the press coverage of the AIDS crisis, with newspapers overwhelmingly employing proactive responses to the threats posed by HIV/AIDS to individual and societal integrity. Whilst certain papers tended towards reporting situations from relatively neutral and serious stances, others used loaded language and conflated facts to create impressions of the crisis from specific, pre-established viewpoints.

This chapter has established how religion, science and rhetoric have provided frameworks for three key response strategies to HIV/AIDS. Evidence for all three of these approaches can be observed across the coverage of the AIDS crisis as provided by the Québec press. Many of the articles were highly motivated by religious or moral understandings of HIV/AIDS. Evidence of this

approach can be found in fact-based examples of writing as well as in more subjective opinion pieces. Great attention was paid by all sections of the press (regardless of calibre) to the sexual transmission of the virus and to the sexual minority of MSM, particularly gay men, who were initially implicated in the emergence of the virus. These focuses may indeed have reflected the epidemiological facts of the crisis. However, what raises suspicion is the way in which these facts were conveyed with overtones of judgement and even disgust, suggesting that writers sought to moralise the situation at hand. For example, one particular article in *The Gazette* on the occasion of the 1989 International AIDS Conference in Montréal likened gay men to invasive agents of disease who were intentionally spreading death and suffering. The lengthy, page-two piece, part-opinion and part-exposé, was headed by the inflammatory title 'From Bathhouses to Bushes, Gay Sex Booming':

From the bathhouses of downtown and beyond to the bushes of Mount Royal and private bedrooms all over the city, gay sex is alive and flourishing. Young gay men are out having a good time. They're drinking, dancing and doing drugs. And they're having sex – up to several encounters a night with several different men. (Dunn, 1989)

Recalling Foucault's conception of 'the homosexual' and its dissemination as a form of social control, this particular article, rather than reporting the situation from a neutral stance, pathologises and homogenises the tendencies and desires of gay men and thus strongly cast HIV-positive homosexuals as moral deviants entirely responsible for their own fate. The use of the word 'flourishing' in particular conjures emotive imagery of HIV and gay men as dangerously irresponsible and unstoppable threats.

Similarly, in an earlier article in 1984, *La Presse* reported the findings of a major University of California study into the transmission of HIV and under the frightening title of 'une étude établit un lien direct entre la sodomie et le SIDA'. However, the main body of the very same article features a scientist stating contradictorily that no link had been proven between anal sex and AIDS. The

article's title, which serves only to add shock value, is unsubstantiated by its content. The article also quoted Roger Detels, a scientist from the University of California, as saying:

Si j'étais « gai » [...] et si je devais examiner méthodiquement les risques, je serais porté à chercher autre chose que le coït anal. Chaque homosexuel actif doit prendre sa décision. (*La Presse*, 1984a)

In contrast to the 1989 article in *The Gazette*, which took a more anecdotal tone, the article featured in *La Presse* uses a scientific perspective to add a sense of objectivity and give weight to its assessment of the situation. However, the scientist's final comments ultimately place the responsibility of the AIDS crisis squarely upon the shoulders of gay men. What the scientist's opinion ignores are the other factors that played an important part in the spread of HIV, namely the lack of public information that arose partly from the virus's uniqueness and partly from the indifference of authorities to AIDS. His comments also ignore the positive role played by safer sex in limiting the spread of HIV; the options available to gay men thus appear to be limited to either chastity or death. Such a portrayal reinforces the perception of gay men as people who lead reckless and abnormal lives, whilst the scientist's status as an embodiment of rationality and truth gives greater credence to the judgement of gay men that he provides.

One particular individual scrutinised by the Québec press was Rock Hudson, a glittering Hollywood star who spent his career hiding the true nature of his sexual preferences and whose death from AIDS in 1985 shook the Western world. Kenneth MacKinnon proposes that Hudson's death obliged onlookers to take one of two sides, portraying him either as a reckless phoney or as a tragic hero condemned by his own fame (MacKinnon, 1992: 180). The Québec press tended towards this latter stance; an article in *La Presse* (1985), 'Rock Hudson : Première vedette victime du SIDA', finds it incredible that someone as masculine and apparently heterosexual as Hudson could succumb to AIDS. The piece makes great play of the actor's physique, 'sa haute stature – 1,90m – ses traits classiques et sa forte présence'. These comments reinforce the stereotypes

concerning PLWHAs as essentially weak in character and limp-wristed in demeanour. The article continues by describing how Hudson had become 'le symbole de la lutte courageuse et discrète d'un homme contre une maladie encore incurable'. The article suggests that the fight of a superstar, a man who the world presumed to be straight, against AIDS, a disease that the world presumed to be exclusively gay, should be branded as courageous and discreet, thus implying that the life of Rock Hudson can still be revered, in spite of his death from a 'gay disease', because he had never seemed to be gay. Reflecting its tabloid tendencies, *Le Journal de Montréal* dedicated five pages (including its front page) to the death of Hudson, using a series of large, brash headlines (ROCK HUDSON emporté par le SIDA' and 'Rock Hudson est MORT!') to sensationalise the situation and categorically connect Hudson to HIV. The paper also included a full-page picture of Hudson embracing Doris Day in the 1959 film *Any Way the Wind Blows*, as if denying his homosexuality on his behalf to the very end of his life (*Le Journal de Montréal*, 1985c). In contrast, the article featured in *Le Devoir* (1985), 'Victime du sida : Hudson s'éteint', with its small photo, restrained title and text detailing his life and career, covered the star's death in a far more subdued manner. The coverage of Hudson's death provided by the Québec press underscores a collective desire to confront HIV/AIDS by symbolically confining the illness to certain marginalised groups of society and reinforcing the binaries of gay and straight, bad and good and AIDS and non-AIDS. The examples demonstrate how the reporting of the factual developments of the AIDS crisis can be influenced by moral judgement.¹²

Many articles indicated a faith in the abilities of science to control the spread of HIV and to neutralise its side effects. Such mediations documented the progress made in the identification and scientific understanding of HIV and the discovery and trial of effective treatments, seeking to approach HIV/AIDS rationally. However, in many cases, articles that reported the medical and clinical developments relating to HIV/AIDS did so in a way that alienated, or even

¹² For further evidence of articles inspired by religious discourses, see Brunet (1993), Delorme (1984), Dufresne (1987), *Le Journal de Montréal* (1985a), Lessard (1985), Noël (1987, 1992c), *La Presse* (1987a) and Regush (1984a).

completely removed, PLWHAs from situations in which they were intimately involved. The reporting of AIDS-related infections and deaths, both in Québec, Canada and elsewhere, was a recurring trope of all of the newspapers studied. Using statistics to comprehend the AIDS crisis may appear both credible and justifiable, with such numbers allowing readers to take stock of the toll taken by HIV on human life. However, these figures were often conveyed through inflammatory headlines that exaggerated the facts of the situation. An article that appeared in *La Presse* (1983) reported that 'plus de Haïtiens semblent atteints du SIDA au Québec qu'aux États-Unis'. Given that the US was strongly perceived as the epicentre of the AIDS crisis, such a headline, printed in an unmissable, bold font, seems particularly alarmist. Moreover, the title is followed by the less sensational figures that out of only six women in Québec who at the time were diagnosed with AIDS, four were Haitian, whilst a doctor contradicting the assertion of the article's title is quoted as stating that 'le nombre de cas de SIDA au Québec est si petit qu'il est difficile de faire une analyse scientifique précise'. One can therefore question whether such articles were motivated by the desire to inform their readership of the repercussions of HIV, or by the pressure to increase sales, irrespective of the sense of panic that might be created by an erroneous but eye-catching headline. In 1984, Montréal's Royal Victoria Hospital reported that, according to its research, up to 30,000 gay male Montrealers could be carriers of HIV. The findings of the report were reported by both *The Gazette* and *Dimanche Matin*, a now-defunct Québec Sunday paper that in 1984 described itself as 'Le no. 1 des hebdomadaires français d'Amérique'. *The Gazette* placed the report's findings on its front page, proclaiming that '30,000 in Montreal may have AIDS virus' and detailing the hospital's methodology and advice for the city's gay men (Regush, 1984b). In contrast, *Dimanche Matin* published an enormous and disquieting white-on-blue headline on its front page, '30 000 « GAIS » QUÉBÉCOIS PEUVENT ÊTRE ATTEINTS DU VIRUS SIDA'. It is only on page five that, under the sub-heading 'C'est l'état épidémique, selon une enquête', some of the facts of the report are detailed in an article, and that a minute space is given to David Cassidy, President of the Association des gais Montréalais, to advocate safer sex (*Dimanche Matin*, 1984). These examples

demonstrate the pattern observed across the entire press of articles whose scaremongering titles are wilfully alarmist and unsubstantiated by their content.¹³

In terms of rhetorical responses, whilst the use of metaphor to give meaning to HIV appears relatively limited, the impulse to deny the existence of AIDS and those it touched is reflected in the articles' photographic elements. Specifically, the almost total lack of images of PLWHAs, particularly those whose illness was advanced, can be interpreted as the reluctance of the mainstream press to truly contemplate the threat posed by HIV and the abject spectre of life infiltrated by death that PLWHAs, physically deformed by their infections and so visibly bearing traces of their impending mortality, so troublingly represented.¹⁴ The rhetoric of many newspaper articles found in the Archives gaies du Québec also suggest, tacitly or overtly, that HIV was either limited to marginalised demographics or, contradictorily, that the virus was on the verge of mass proliferation. The purpose and motivation for the latter suggestion is unclear, and ultimately calls into question the relationship between the press and public opinion. On the one hand, articles that suggested the impending implosion of AIDS cases were arguably reacting to (and mirroring) genuine fears of widespread infection. On the other hand, such articles highlight the fine line that exists between reporting worrisome events and wilful fearmongering. Whatever the motivations of the different articles and newspapers, the dichotomy that exists between the portrayal of an apparently contained and simultaneously rampant HIV exemplifies the virus's ability to stir a highly potent sense of panic, despite evidence to the contrary of a limited number of effective practical responses (principally safer sex techniques and latterly the first effective anti-retroviral drug azidothymidine (AZT)) to the threat of the disease.

For the most part, the response strategies used by the Québec press to confront the AIDS crisis adopt the perspective of a non-PLWHA. Mediations of HIV that appeared in all of the major titles of the Québec press used science, religion and rhetoric to combat the threats posed by the virus to the health of the uninfected individual and society. A comparison between these reactions and

¹³ For further evidence of articles inspired by scientific discourses, see Altman (1985), Chaillé (1985), Coudé-Lord (1983), Harting (1992a), *Le Journal de Montréal* (1983, 1985b), Noël (1992b), *La Presse* (1984b, 1987c, 1987d) and Ubelacker (1993).

¹⁴ '[L'abjection] est la mort infestant la vie' (Kristeva, 1980: 12).

those found in the Québec LGBT press demonstrates how the AIDS crisis was comprehended by other printed sources of information from the perspective of PLWHAs. *Fugues* is a Francophone LGBT monthly magazine that is distributed for free in queer establishments across Québec as well as in public spaces such as supermarkets. It is the most widely read LGBT publication in Québec, and features a broad range of articles relating to LGBT health, culture, society, politics (Québec, Canadian and international), clubbing, food and drink and adult services. *Fugues* has been in print since 1984, two years after the first case of AIDS was documented in Canada, and thus provides an insight into the experiences and perspectives of one of the most adversely affected demographics caught up in the AIDS crisis. From its inception, *Fugues* has reported on the complex social, political and personal implications of HIV, with a particular focus on the crisis as it was experienced in Montréal. In contrast with the theoretical framework established earlier, the magazine's reporting of the AIDS crisis nuances the response strategies built around religion, science and rhetoric and consistently prioritises the needs of PLWHAs.

Articles in *Fugues* are not inspired by religious, potentially moralising understandings of the AIDS crisis; there is no evidence of writers seeking to pass either overt or covert judgement on those infected by HIV. Instead, they promote a more holistic approach, encouraging readers to actively confront and explore the difficult emotions stirred by the virus with others as a means of finding understanding, stability and closure. Such reflections are typified by the magazine's promotion of events organised by the Comité sida aide Montréal (C-SAM), a support group for PLWHAs that was prominent in the early years of the AIDS crisis. C-SAM held regular coffee evenings, where anyone could drop in and exchange with trained councillors or other patrons about their concerns regarding HIV/AIDS:

Le C-SAM ouvre ses portes [...] à tous ceux (sans distinction) qui désirent se renseigner sur ses activités, partager leurs craintes ou leur vécu au Sida et à ses différentes manifestations [...] ou tout

simplement venir voir ce qui se passe et savourer un bon café.
(*Fugues*, 1987)

These words are suggestive of resolve of those touched by HIV to form positive, supportive and welcoming forms of community, signalling the effectiveness of dialogue and communion in the face of uncertainty and pain, both physical and emotional. *Fugues* also advertised and critiqued cultural products and events that interacted with the AIDS crisis. Under the Culture section of the publication, HIV/AIDS-related films and works of literature, produced both domestically and internationally, were regularly put under the spotlight. These reviews advocated the use of artistic media and creative processes as a legitimate and fruitful means of understanding the personal and societal repercussions of the AIDS crisis. For example, the magazine promoted the exhibition of the AIDS Memorial Quilt at the Montréal Velodrome in 1989 (*Fugues*, 1989). The story of the quilt, more formally known as The NAMES Project, began in San Francisco in 1987. Those mourning the loss of a loved one to AIDS were invited to create a memorial quilt panel to celebrate the life of the deceased individual. The popularity and prominence of the project exploded, to the extent that the quilt soon toured nationally and internationally to allow people across the world to contribute to the project and to share in a process of collective grieving. Today, the quilt is composed of over 48,000 panels (The NAMES Project Foundation, [no date]). During its 1989 visit to Montréal, the quilt was promoted by *Fugues* as a way to take stock of the losses felt by the city's LGBT population and mourn as a community.¹⁵

Unlike the mainstream press, whose science-based articles often relied principally upon often inflammatory and exaggerated statistics relating to infection and death, and that broadly ignored the needs of PLWHAs, *Fugues* has consistently offered scientific considerations of HIV that are both informative and compassionate. For example, in 1989 and 1990, the magazine included a monthly column entitled 'Qualité de VIH', in which writer Francis Bates provided a range of scientific information relating the virus, including its modus operandi and transmission, as well as the mechanisms available to test and verify one's

¹⁵ The quilt returned to Montréal in 1992, when it was exhibited at the Maurice Richard Arena.

serostatus. In addition, Bates blended these objective reports with a consideration of some of the more human aspects of the crisis, including options for health care at home and the counselling available to PLWHAs through the Québec public health system. Above all, Bates' column encourages his readers to arm themselves with facts as a form of defence against the horrors of AIDS:

Nous pouvons vous fournir l'information nécessaire [...] vous pouvez trouver du support auprès d'individus qui comprennent votre dilemme, car ils le vivent aussi. La communauté gaie est atterrée par cette épidémie [...] nous faisons tous face à des décisions de survie importantes, mais ces décisions doivent être prises. (Bates, 1990b)

His desire to employ knowledge to assist those facing AIDS is reflected in his signposting his readers to more thorough sources of information, including mail-order pamphlets, locally-available literature and telephone hotlines, that could provide both comfort and empowerment to those seeking to understand potentially difficult and daunting situations. *Fugues* thus acted as a formalised and vital source of facts and practical solutions to those living with and dying from AIDS in an era in which unbiased and accessible information was scarce.¹⁶ *Fugues* also prominently advocated safer sex, with full-page advertisements portraying condoms as being a necessity that was also fun, safe and in vogue. Opinion pieces blended information concerning the mechanics of safer sex with subjective musings that equated condoms to a source of binding and emancipatory community solidarity:

On parle beaucoup du sida. C'est une épidémie qui nous concerne tous. Pour nous protéger, nous disposons de deux armes essentielles, l'information et la prévention [...] le sécurisexe est sans conteste, aujourd'hui, le meilleur moyen de prendre son pied, car le moins

¹⁶ '[Celle-ci est] une page qui se veut informative dans ce désert de mes informations qui s'appelle Montréal' (Bates, 1990a).

dangereux, le plus honnête et le plus respectueux de la vie, la sienne comme celle des autres. (*Fugues*, 1994)

Compared to those appearing in the mainstream press, these types of article demonstrate a greater desire on the part of *Fugues* to use scientific, fact-based understandings of HIV as a tool to empower its readers to make positive decisions that benefit their physical, mental and social wellbeing, as well as strengthen the sense of community amongst Montréal's LGBT population. In contrast to newspaper articles whose use of science stirred consternation and alienated PLWHAs, articles appearing in *Fugues* demonstrate that scientific approaches to the AIDS crisis could also be sensitive to the human needs of PLWHAs and members of the demographic most adversely affected by HIV.

The rhetoric evident in *Fugues'* coverage of the crisis makes clear the publication's supportive commitment to those living with and dying from AIDS. Whilst the language and focus of writers in the mainstream press principally suggested a fear of contamination, the tone and subject matter of the articles written for *Fugues* indicate an unwavering hope for an improved situation and a strong sense of anger at the unjust situation and treatment of PLWHAs. The presence of these particular tropes in a publication whose readership is principally LGBT, coupled with the tropes' distinct absence in mainstream publications aimed at broader audiences, offers a number of possible conclusions. In the first instance, the comparison strengthens the hypothesis that one's relationship with HIV/AIDS is markedly influenced by one's HIV-status and by how one identifies oneself in relation to the AIDS crisis. Gay communities across Western societies were devastated by HIV/AIDS, with those of Québec being no exception. Publications written by members of adversely affected demographics, such as those evident in *Fugues*, thus display a better understanding of the issues of most importance to those living with HIV. Conversely, in seeking to reach out to a broader audience, and therefore necessarily to one with less direct experience of the AIDS crisis, the publications of the mainstream Québec press reflect the fears felt by the wider public in the face of what appeared to be a crisis of unstoppable proportions. Unlike *Fugues*,

these publications did not direct their readership to community events designed to foster solidarity and understanding, nor did they express frustration at the perceived indifference of society and authorities, nor did they openly discuss safer sex. This suggests that mainstream publications considered these specific questions to be of little relevance to their audience, or that their readers may have found such issues unpalatable.

Responding to HIV/AIDS using artistic frameworks

People necessarily experience all maladies as either somebody touched by illness or somebody who remains untouched. The contagious nature of HIV and its capacity to threaten physical, social and moral integrity deepens the rift between these two binary standpoints. The analysis of the reflections of the AIDS crisis published across the Québec press has demonstrated this rift between mainstream publications that target the general public and LGBT-specific publications, such as *Fugues*, that speak to a demographic that found itself at the epicentre of the crisis; both kinds of publication thus exclusively address two types of audience, further entrenching a harmful culture of division. It has also indicated the inherent shortcomings of the daily printed press as a medium for dealing in depth with the complexities of the AIDS crisis. It is unsurprising that, working under the physical constraints of deadlines and page space, as well as the sociocultural influences of politics and ideology, journalists may have produced mediations of the crisis that were brief, biased and reliant upon pre-existing tropes and forms of shorthand.

Art, in contrast, offers an entirely different means of conveying messages about the AIDS crisis and of reflecting upon the diverse and complex societal, physical and personal ramifications of HIV. Dance, fictional writing, poetry, song, theatre, painting and drawing are just some of the forms of art that have been used globally (but to particularly striking effect in Québec cinema) as a tool to interact with the AIDS crisis. The breadth and longevity of the Creative section of *Fugues* are suggestive of the advantages to be gained from doing so. In the first instance, art is (in principle) produced in a way that is free from overt political and ideological influence. Whilst a journalist may have to answer to an editor, anyone creating a piece of art can do so as they please, enabling the individual to express

their opinions and feelings honestly and openly. Additionally, art constitutes a more flexible space in which HIV/AIDS can be fully explored. Unconstrained by time limits and word counts, creators of AIDS-related creative works can take the time and space, both physical and figurative, necessary to fully engage in the process of confronting the complex and pervasive fears stirred by the virus that is fundamentally necessary to the construction of more constructive and sympathetic understandings of HIV.¹⁷ Whilst the examples of print media taken from the mainstream Québec press engaged with the more factual aspects of the AIDS crisis, they seldom interacted with its emotional aspects, a focus obliged in part by the formalities of journalism. Compared to the factual written word, artistic, creative media have a far greater freedom to be expressive, to transcribe and evoke the essence of feelings one may experience in the face of HIV, and to avoid, interrogate or subvert predominant discourses motivated by stereotypes, division and fear. When compared to the written press, art is also a more democratised means of understanding AIDS. Whilst mainstream journalism and its messages are controlled by powerful elites, theoretically anyone can produce a piece of HIV/AIDS-related art, provided that they possess the necessary tools. The NAMES Project constitutes a perfect example of how creative media can allow anyone from any corner of society to contribute to an artistic project whose message can be heard and resonate across the globe. Different forms of art can be used by an individual to tell stories of the trauma they have experienced, a potentially cathartic process that can liberate the teller from the burden of emotion, silence and a status quo that discourages the overt expression of feelings. This has particularly been the case amongst LGBT populations worldwide, whose historic affinities with intellectually- and emotionally-engaged creative practices and expression made art one of the de-facto tools of choice for MSM seeking to instigate cathartic and collective processes of grieving, resistance and understanding.¹⁸

¹⁷ 'The intense ambivalence and fears about both sexuality and disease are too overpowering to permit much rational discourse on the politics of sex and germs. Yet this dimension, as well as an understanding of the immediate tragedy, is essential to successfully connect individual experiences with the social and political structures that impede attempts to cope with AIDS at every level' (Patton, 1985: 17).

¹⁸ 'The arts have also served as an arena in which homosexuals can address – and redress – the inequities of their social status. When AIDS struck, this complex involvement with creativity became a powerful weapon for a community under medical and political siege. The arts enabled gay men to bear witness to their situation, express feelings of grief that society often distorts, and

Film in particular is an artistic medium whose advantages in the mediation of the AIDS crisis are manifold. Principally, it is a highly flexible medium whose applications, types and outreach are potentially great. Film's many different genres, associated with a wide spectrum of different audiences, equate to a huge variety in the possible format, style and content of any given film's interrogation of HIV/AIDS. Documentaries and arthouse film and are broadly consumed and valued by an audience that can be characterised as culturally literate and intellectually engaged. Fictional feature films, on the other hand, can be seen and appreciated by an audience composed of people of all walks of life, intellectual or otherwise. In contrast to a gallery or theatre, cultural sites that can intimidate, the cinema stands out as a markedly more inclusive site of cultural exchange. The relative popularity of film in mass culture globally allows those using film as a means of reflecting on the AIDS crisis to access a potentially large and diverse audience. Considered therefore in relation to other, more highbrow artistic media, film possesses a great capacity both to contemplate HIV in a variety of settings, styles and narrative structures and to incite societal conversation on a range of scales and across a host of different crowds. The ability of film to appeal to a wide range of audiences could helpfully contribute to bridging the gaps between the perspectives and experiences of PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs, provoking constructive and revelatory dialogue and fostering a greater sense of cohesion and understanding between the two often polarised groups and identities. Filmmaking can also offer anyone the opportunity to engage in a cathartic process and create film themselves. In addition to high-budget films produced by professional directors, low-budget film can offer PLWHAs opportunities to explore their condition and life situation through the creative processes associated with the medium. As this chapter has demonstrated, the AIDS crisis has proved to be a key event of the twentieth century, defined by both denial and refusal to see, acknowledge and respond to the obvious and graphic suffering of certain marginalised demographics. The visual, photographic and demonstrative qualities of film could therefore allow HIV/AIDS-related cinema to deal with the

create a model for communal solidarity, personal devotion, and sexual caution that would be necessary to combat a sexually transmitted disease with no known cure' (Goldstein, 1990: 297).

political, social, moral and personal issues at play in the AIDS crisis with particular effectiveness.

A case study of specifically Québécois HIV/AIDS-related film is one that is especially valuable and revealing. This chapter has already outlined how Québec's contemporary history is one defined by the often opposing forces of modern internationalism and protectionist nativism. Echoes of this latter tendency are particularly noticeable across Québec's contemporary cinema. In *Quebec National Cinema*, Bill Marshall argues that, owing to unresolved questions relating to Québec's complex political situation, the province's cinema is largely characterised by themes of nationhood and identity, preoccupations that are 'ever provisional, historically contingent, ceaselessly elaborated [yet] inescapable' (Marshall, 2001: 1-2). Québec cinema's broad fixation on self-questioning has a number of potential impacts on its consideration of the AIDS crisis, a truly global event that broke down all national, cultural, historical and moral borders that lay before it. On the one hand, Québec cinema's deep interest in the investigation of its history, condition and people could result in a cinematic consideration of the crisis that disentangles and examines the relationships between HIV, PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs in revealing local contexts. Alternatively, Québec cinema's introverted, parochial tendencies could prohibit it from considering the AIDS crisis for the international phenomenon that it is.

Also of great potential influence is Québec's (and particularly Montréal's) status as a hub for cultural production and activity. Thanks in part to the legacy of *la Révolution tranquille*, Québec is a well-educated and, broadly-speaking, well-informed society. Montréal in particular is a vibrant and effervescent cosmopolitan hub for all forms of socially-engaged culture, ranging from dance, theatre and fine art to literature, digital and street art. The city is particularly cine-literate, acting as the centre for the production and consumption of Québec film and the hosting of a range of prominent film festivals encompassing a range of different cinematic genres, including the Festival des Films du Monde, Rencontres Internationales du Documentaire de Montréal, Festival des Films Underground de Montréal and Animaze, a festival dedicated to animation. Québec's rich artistic and cinematic scene is indicative of its openness to engage with important societal questions through cultural productivity.

The case for this study is also bolstered by a number of precedents set by Québec society specifically related to reactions to HIV/AIDS. The analysis of the Québec press's coverage of the AIDS crisis gave a mixed impression of Québec's relationship with HIV, hinting at the societal difficulties and prejudice faced by PLWHAs and the reluctance of wider society to face up to the realities of the AIDS crisis. However, in contrast, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Quebeckers have made notable and visible demonstrations of their inclination to stand in solidarity with PLWHAs, with Montréal proving to be a centre for political action on a range of issues raised by HIV. In 1989, ACT-UP established a chapter in Montréal to fight for the rights of the city's PLWHAs (Sarfati, 1989). The group used creative and performative modes of protest to express their anger at the situations faced by the city's PLWHA and the inaction of government. Of particular note was the group's use of 'die-ins', whereby members would congregate in public spaces and lie down *en masse* in silence in a striking representation of the lives and voices of those lost to AIDS and wider society's ignoring of them (Cauchon, 1990). The presence and activity of the Montréal chapter demonstrate a penchant for a radical form of political action that can be seen as a characteristic strand of Montréal society.¹⁹ The city also hosts many charitable events that cultivate a strong sense of unity between PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs. A host of activities were organised on the occasion of the first World AIDS Day in 1988, including a 200-strong candlelit march from Parc La Fontaine to Square Viger and condom 'give-aways' at locations throughout the downtown area (Bonneau, 1988), indicating the desires of Montrealers to unite around communal activity and show solidarity. Established in 1992 by prominent Montréal businessman and PLWHA Ron Farha, the Farha Foundation has raised and distributed almost CAD\$ 10 million to 76 HIV/AIDS organisations across Québec (Farha Foundation, [no

¹⁹ ACT-UP Montréal also caught the attention of the public eye on further occasions. In 1992, activists protested against the presence of Monseigneur Jean-Claude Turcotte, a Catholic Cardinal, at an AIDS conference in Montréal; in the light of recent comments made by Pope John Paul II condemning homosexuality and condoms, ACT-UP members drowned out the Cardinal's speech with cries of protest and accusations of hypocrisy (Harting, 1992b). In 1993, ACT-UP Montréal protested against the forced moving of PLWHAs from Montréal's Hôtel-Dieu Hospital away from Québec's most significant AIDS research and care centre (Bonhomme, 1993). Decrying the decision of the provincial government, who cited lack of space for the growing number of PLWHAs at Hôtel-Dieu, ACT-UP demanded that money be spent on the expansion of the hospital, an investment that would enable PLWHAs to stay put and avoid a move that would destabilise their physical and mental wellbeing.

date]). These funds have been raised most notably through ÇA MARCHÉ, a sponsored walk (and major event on the city's calendar) that parades annually through Montréal. Club parties have also acted as a significant source of funds for HIV/AIDS organisations. Established in 1991, Bad Boy Club Montréal (BBCM) sought to celebrate the vitality and cultural spirit of the city's LGBT population during a difficult time and raise vital funds for organisations working on the front line of the AIDS crisis. BBCM orchestrated Black and Blue, a week-long clubbing event that combined music, performance and dance. Black and Blue has now become a major annual feature on the global gay clubbing circuit. In the process, BBCM has raised over CAD\$ 1.4 million since its inception for charitable causes linked to HIV/AIDS. (Bad Boy Club Montréal, [no date]). These prominent gestures of solidarity are indicative of the vocal action taken by Quebeckers in the name of PLWHAs and the climate of support and friendship that PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs successfully fostered.

In Québec, of all artistic media, film appears to have been the most consistently employed to confront the meanings and realities of the AIDS crisis.²⁰ The existence of an extensive and varied corpus of films relating to HIV/AIDS, as developed and produced in Québec, begins to suggest the potential affinities between the medium of film and the interrogation of the AIDS crisis. Certainly,

²⁰ Film is not the only creative medium to have been used in Québec to reflect on the AIDS crisis. In terms of literature, Michel Tremblay's *Le Cœur éclaté* (1989) is one of the most prominent works of Québécois fiction to touch upon the AIDS crisis. Of particular note is the flurry of varied, HIV/AIDS-related artistic activity that occurred around the occasion of the 1989 International AIDS Conference held in Montréal. A touring collection of over 200 HIV prevention posters from around the world was exhibited under the banner of *Visual AIDS* at venues across the city (Crevier, 1989). Conference organisers also arranged a programme of public artistic activity entitled *SIDART*; highlights included the transformation of part of Montréal's underground city into a gallery of HIV/AIDS-related paintings, posters and photography, an exposition of a portion of the NAMES project quilt at the city's velodrome, the performance of a range of locally- and internationally-produced, HIV/AIDS-related plays, the projection of an international selection of AIDS films and videos organised by the NFB, and the organisation of a series of round-table discussions involving prominent international artists involved in representations of the virus (including Michel Tremblay) on the themes of AIDS and literature, television advertisements and film (Cauchon, 1989). In November 1992, Montréal's Musée d'art contemporain hosted a dance recital of two performances, *When we dreamed the other Heaven* and *Incurable*, as an homage to those who had died from AIDS. Art forms have also been used for charitable purposes. In May 1992, live music was used to raise funds for Montréal's AIDS charities, with bands performing at the *Earth Vs. AIDS* benefit concert at the Rialto Theatre on Avenue du Parc (*The Gazette*, 1992). In 1993, popular Québécois musicians, including Michel Rivard, Pierre Bertrand and Marie-Denise Pelletier, united to create *Au nom de l'amour*, a compilation album whose profits went towards charitable causes related to HIV/AIDS (Blais, 1993). These instances of cultural activity, however, are one-off occurrences, and do not match the same levels of sustained productivity evident in the corpus of HIV/AIDS-related film.

film has been used across different echelons of Montréal society to confront HIV/AIDS constructively. In 1987, pharmacies in the Montréal region began to stock video cassettes that explained the HIV/AIDS from a scientific standpoint. The tapes, available for loan to customers seeking to learn more about HIV, demonstrate the potential of film to reach and inform people from all walks of life (*La Presse*, 1987b). Montréal's LGBT population has also shown a strong desire to reflect upon the AIDS crisis through international film. First held in 1988, Image + Nation is a film festival held in venues across Montréal that is dedicated to domestically- and internationally-produced film relating to LGBT experiences. The festival has become a major event in the global calendar of LGBT film, often hosting premières and events with prominent filmmakers. Since its inception, Image + Nation has made concerted efforts to screen international film relating specifically to the AIDS crisis. Copies of festival's early programmes, held at the Archives gaies du Québec, reveal that, during the pre-1996 period, the festival screened a range of feature-length fictional films, documentaries and short films from Canada (*Frank's Cock* [Mike Hoolboom, 1993]), the US (*Silverlake Life: The View from Here* [Tom Joslin and Peter Friedman, 1993]), France (*Sida : Paroles de l'un à l'autre* [Paule Muxel and Bertrand de Solliers, 1993]), Germany (*Positive* [Rosa von Prauhheim, 1990]), the UK (*The Garden* [Derek Jarman, 1990]) and Italy (*Parole Chiave* [Giampaolo Marzi, 1994]) that all touched upon HIV and the situation of PLWHAs. A special programme of films entitled *Hommages* was organised in 1993 to commemorate the works of PLWHA filmmakers (including Hungary's Amos Gutman, Britain's Stuart Marshall and France's Cyril Collard and Michel Béna) who had died from their conditions, whilst in 1995, a series of *courts métrages* under the banner *Panorama* showcased HIV/AIDS-related shorts from Canada, the US, the UK and Australia. Also in 1995, Image + Nation hosted the first (and last) edition of the Festival International du Film VIH & SIDA de Montréal. Inspired by a similar event held in Paris, the organisers of the Montréal edition screened almost 150 HIV/AIDS-related films and videos from all over the world, free of charge, with the aim of showcasing the potential of film as a medium to shed light on global experiences of the virus, to halt the spread of HIV and to educate audiences worldwide (Lafontaine, 1995). Described by Thomas Waugh (2006: 477) as 'one of the most significant and varied AIDS cultural events ever held in [Canada]', the festival confirmed Montréal's status as a national centre for

artistic reflection on the AIDS crisis and its dedication to the exploration of HIV/AIDS through the medium of film. The evidence considered above suggests that, in the context of a culturally-engaged, cinema-going sub-group of Montréal's population, film was employed as a communal, cathartic process of witnessing that allowed people to congregate, converse and foster local and global senses of unity in the face of HIV. Québec thus displays strong evidence of its willingness to stand shoulder to shoulder, both locally and internationally, with those living with HIV/AIDS. An in-depth consideration of the HIV/AIDS-related film produced there is thus the next logical step in building a more complete picture of Québec's cultural and societal responses to the AIDS crisis.

In order to reveal as much as possible about the relationship between film and HIV at the time when the AIDS crisis was inflicting the most damage, this thesis will concentrate on films that were produced in Québec prior to the discovery and introduction of combination therapy in 1996. The corpus of ten films exhibits a range of forms, content and approaches and can be divided into the three distinct genres: documentary, testimonial film and feature film.²¹ Coincidentally, a similar set of categories emerges over the course of Thomas Waugh's evaluation of Canadian HIV/AIDS-related film (Waugh, 2006: 277-326). This would suggest that the Québec films align at least partially with the trends also evident in their Anglophone Canadian counterparts. The three groupings permit a comparative analysis of the corpus both within and between the three identified genres that will identify why and how filmmakers used the versatility of film as an expressive medium to reflect on the AIDS crisis in its many complex social, political, and emotional and personal contexts.

²¹ Through research, I was able to identify seven further HIV/AIDS-related films created by Quebecers. *SIDA = VIE* (Louis-Philippe Viau, 1996) is a made-for-TV, feature-length documentary that explores the shifting realities of HIV at the juncture between a pre- and post-combination therapy world through the perspective of clinical experts. *Le Sida au Féminin* (Marie Fortin and Lise Bonenfant, 1988) is a documentary that reflects upon the AIDS crisis as it was experienced in Québec by women whose partners had died from AIDS. Two short documentaries, *J'me sus poussée. Faut que j'me sauve* (Stéphanie Hénault, 1992) and *Pour l'amour de Salomé* (Hugo Brochu, 1992) also focus on HIV from a female perspective, the latter film through the experiences of Martine, a homeless PLWHA. *Ma Vie* (Denis Langlois, 1992) is a fictional short film that reflects creatively on the multiple lives of a young PLWHA (see Chapter Four, p.194). *Des Sourires et des hommes* (1992) and *C'est pas à soir qu'on va se noyer* (1994), both by François Tessier, are short films that straddle the boundaries between prevention film and fiction, dramatising the contemporary place of condoms in relationships, both gay and straight. Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain copies of these particular films.

The individual films are primarily shaped and influenced by the different inherent characteristics and motivations of their chosen genre, but, as a comparative analysis both within and between the genres will show, the boundaries of each category are porous, allowing a productive interchange of approaches and techniques. The power of the documentary lies in its ability to educate and present HIV in a non-fictional setting. Those who produce documentaries are motivated by a desire to record the experiences of real people and to expose events and situations as they occur in reality. This chapter has shown that many significant aspects of the AIDS crisis were afforded little or no coverage in the mainstream press, being deemed by the media, so it seems, either as unimportant or 'too much' for the general public. In contrast, documentaries that focus upon the AIDS crisis can record and convey some of the more difficult and potentially unpalatable aspects of the crisis in a non-judgemental and dispassionate manner to those who seek to watch, witness and learn, irrespective of their HIV status. Furthermore, the recognition by such films of the emotional and physical distress caused by the virus may bring a sense of relief, support and emancipation to those who are actually living with HIV/AIDS. Chapter Two of this thesis examines the similarities and differences that exist between three Québec documentaries (*Mortel désir* [Mario Dufour, 1992], *Médecins de cœur* [Tahani Rached, 1993] and *Quand l'amour est gai* [Laurent Gagliardi, 1994]), all of which squarely confront many of the complex social and emotional questions raised by the AIDS crisis and thereby nuance or indeed debunk popular misconceptions, casting the crisis in a range of new and different lights.

The second genre, testimonial film, differs from the documentary in adopting, as its exclusive viewpoint, the subjectively presented experiences and feelings of PLWHAs. Harnessing both the creative and documentary potential of film, PLWHAs seeking to vocalise and record their emotions have produced autobiographical testimonies that are expressive, experimental, shocking and deeply intimate. The makers of these testimonial films may not produce their works with widespread distribution in mind, a fact often reflected in the films' low budgets and unorthodox forms. However, having created a film, a PLWHA may then choose to share it with an audience, allowing others to engage with and witness the emotional journey undertaken by the filmmaker. As examples of this

category, Chapter Three of this thesis examines the cinematic works of two Québécois PLWHAs (*Comment vs dirais-je ?* [Louis Dionne, 1995], *Récit d'A* [Esther Valiquette, 1990] and *Le Singe bleu* [Esther Valiquette, 1992]), who, in their very different ways, have used film as a tool to better understand and realise positive change in their life situations.

In contrast to the documentary, a genre that seeks principally to educate its audiences, and to testimonial film, that focuses on the lived experience of the PLWHA, the feature film seeks principally to entertain its viewers through storytelling. Films belonging to this genre usually recount the fictional tales of characters who, in various modes, are confronted with a range of obstacles that oblige them to undergo a series of physical, emotional, or social changes. The development and progression of these figures elicit responses from the viewer, who may in turn feel joy, sorrow, anger and empathy towards the characters on-screen. The genre's ability to tell such stories to a mass audience offers the possibility of moving a cinematic consideration of the HIV/AIDS beyond committed groups to the mainstream. The analysis of Québec print media demonstrated the multifaceted, incomprehensible and fear-inspiring nature of HIV; a feature film can provide the necessary framework in which one or several aspects of the AIDS crisis can be evoked and relativised in a fictional setting via characters and the situations in which they find themselves, allowing viewers to better relate to HIV and to those it touches. Chapter Four of this thesis will analyse four feature films (*Le Déclin de l'empire américain* [Denys Arcand, 1986], *Love and Human Remains* [Denys Arcand, 1993], *Zero Patience* [John Greyson, 1993] and *L'Escorte* [Denis Langlois, 1996]) that were either produced by Québécois filmmakers or that focussed upon an aspect of the AIDS crisis as it was experienced in Québec. These films use characters and stories to evoke the emotions experienced by PLWHAs and those whose lives intersect with theirs in a range of different social and moral settings and show the gradual incorporation over time of the HIV/AIDS phenomenon into commercially-funded film.

Chapter Two: Documentary

In Chapter One it has been argued that the cinematic format of the documentary can be used advantageously to reflect upon the nature and effects of HIV/AIDS. At face value, as a genre strongly motivated by the desire to reflect on subjects with a sense of plain and unembellished objectivity, it is the antithesis to the sensationalised and often problematic coverage of the AIDS crisis evident in the Québec press. Speaking to an audience that seeks to learn more about the chosen topic, the documentary can educate those who are willing to watch and engage with the film and the issues raised. This chapter will first focus upon the place of the documentary in Québec's broad cinematic history and its particular applications in the mediation of the AIDS crisis in the province. It will then analyse and compare three examples of documentaries to demonstrate how the format has been variously employed by filmmakers to reflect on the AIDS crisis from a range of distinct perspectives involving differing degrees of objectivity and subjectivity. These analyses will identify the potential motivations of the filmmakers behind the documentaries, the audiences they seek to address and the advantages of using this particular genre of film to interrogate the social, political and personal ramifications of HIV/AIDS.

The role and influence of the National Film Board of Canada

Documentary film has played a hugely important role in the formation and examination of Canadian society in the twentieth century, and also of Québec society as its francophone pole. The National Film Board of Canada (NFB), an agency of the federal government and a globally-respected public film board, has consistently produced popular, high-quality, socially-engaged public cinema in both of Canada's official languages.²² The NFB emerged from what was previously known as the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau (CGMPB), established in 1918 with the purpose of producing film to promote

²² The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) is known to Francophones as l'Office national du film (ONF). As I am writing in English, I shall refer to the agency using its English name and acronym.

Canada's credentials as a place for business and tourism. The Bureau's films were shown across the British Empire, projecting Canada and its pull-factors across the world. The rise of talking cinema and the effects of the Great Depression led, however, to the Bureau's decline. In 1938, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King invited Scottish filmmaker John Grierson to produce an audit of the CGMPB and to suggest the changes needed to reinvigorate the Canadian film industry. This report led to the National Film Act (1939) and subsequent founding of the NFB in the same year. With the onset of hostilities in Europe, the NFB was initially tasked with the job of reporting the events of the Second World War to the Canadian people. From the very beginning of its existence in times of hardship and fear, the films produced by the Board were intrinsically linked to the promotion of national unity and positive public morale. After the war, the goal of educating Canadians about the lives of their fellow citizens was retained as a key mission of the NFB. In a country that can often feel too vast and diverse to remain a single nation, the distribution of such film was, and remains, vital to the creation of a sentiment of binding, national cohesion.²³

In addition to establishing the foundations of the NFB, John Grierson is credited by many as establishing the fundamental principles of the documentary as a genre of film. According to film theorist John Corner, Grierson conceived the documentary as an enhanced form of reality that combines the filming of 'the real' with a certain degree of artistic license in order to attain a level of 'deep-seeing'.²⁴ However, Grierson simultaneously dismissed the staging of his subjects, considering any such action as detracting from the veracity of their treatment. He ultimately believed in the camera's ability to record subjects as they would be seen by the human eye and thus capture naturalistic, unembellished and therefore objectively 'truthful' impressions of the world. Grierson's desires to create as objective a form of film as possible had a lasting effect on filmmakers working under the auspices of the NFB. Though the agency was initially exclusively Anglophone, its Francophone arm was developed during the 1950s,

²³ Canada spans six separate time zones and, at its widest point, measures over 5,700 miles from East to West.

²⁴ 'What [Grierson] says may not always be either clear or consistent but the kind of practice which he is putting forward is grounded in a considerable degree of discursive skill and creative "vision" (revelatory, "deep-seeing"), it is not simply a result of any "capturing" performed by the camera. It is therefore thoroughly and self-consciously aestheticised, a symbolically *expressive* activity' (Corner, 1996: 13, italics in original).

with its headquarters moving from Ottawa to Montréal in 1956. This move placed greater distance between the filmmakers and the centre of the federal government, allowing the NFB a greater sense of creative autonomy. This period witnessed the emergence of the *équipe française*, a prolific group of young Francophone filmmakers who were eager to rediscover and reaffirm the status of their province as a distinct society, and to relay this fact to the rest of Canada, with their cameras.²⁵ The members of the group took the Griersonian principles of the documentary and developed them into the internationally noteworthy and recognised genre known as *Cinéma direct*, using new technology to better fulfil Grierson's desire for a more objective, natural-feeling sense of spontaneity and immediacy. Specifically, their developing of lightweight cameras and synchronous sound-recording equipment allowed the filmmakers to approach their protagonists haphazardly rather than premeditatedly, in such a way that increased the significance and impact of both their voices and their physical presence (Marshall, 2001: 21-24). Like Grierson, filmmakers inspired by *Cinéma direct* rejected the scripting of dialogue as typified by the ubiquitous and pervasive cinema of Hollywood, preferring to orchestrate situations from which conversations could emerge as freely and naturally as possible. Gilles Marsolais sees spontaneous dialogue as the defining feature of *Cinéma direct*, positing the spoken word as a quasi-spiritual source of enlightenment, and its instigation and recording as the top priority of the movement's followers.²⁶

Both Grierson and the filmmakers associated with the *équipe française* believed that their particular style of filmmaking allowed them to record their subjects as objectively as possible. However, their beliefs can be critically questioned. Corner's summary of Grierson's principles highlights the fundamental and ultimately unsurmountable tension at play in his conception of

²⁵ The members of the *équipe française* were not the first Quebeckers to use film as a means of capturing and relaying images of their province to the public. Scott MacKenzie (2004: 113-14) outlines how, from the 1920s onwards, 'priest films', typified by the works of Father Albert Tessier, Catholic priest and travelling amateur filmmaker, brought non-fictional films to parishioners, in church basements across the province, that were essential to the development of their national imagery and identity. However, such films' content, predominantly comprising rural scenes of idyll and the respect of traditional, conservative and Catholic values, rendered them dogmatic and propagandist.

²⁶ 'Le principal mérite du cinéma direct aura été sans doute d'introduire la parole au cinéma, c'est-à-dire d'instaurer le règne de la parole véritable, d'avoir ouvert la voie menant à un cinéma *authentiquement* parlant' (Marsolais, 1997: 152, italics in original).

the documentary between the proclaimed desire to interfere as little as possible with the events being filmed, and the desire to capture them with a degree of subjectivity in order to amplify their vitality and impact on screen. Film scholars have deconstructed the claims made by documentarists in relation to the objectivity of their art form as inaccurate, simplistic and potentially dangerous. In *Issues in Contemporary Documentary*, Jane Chapman (2009: 48-49) asserts that subjectivity and objectivity are not absolutes, rather variables that are in constant flux in any given film, and that to believe in the pure objectivity of the documentary form is to limit the positive effects that more subjective elements may have on the treatment of the chosen material. She specifically challenges the 'truthfulness' of *Cinéma direct*, concluding that elements of subjectivity and selective vision are evident in everything from the choice of interviewees to the editing, and that ultimately these films are as subjective as any other form of documentary (Chapman, 2009: 50). Similarly, Bill Nichols argues that documentary film is in fact a 'rhetorical art' that, like any other filmic genre, seeks to convince its viewers of a certain point of view.²⁷ In a further echo of Chapman, he argues that more subjective formal and narrative features, such as re-enactments, can in fact be harnessed to increase the emotive impact and immediacy of the film's more factual content (Nichols, 2016: 41). However, Nichols also asserts that such material must be used honestly and openly; to deny its subjective and rhetorical nature would be to mislead the viewer and would thus be unethical. It is clear that no documentary can ever achieve total objectivity. However, when objective and subjective approaches are employed in tandem, they can capture not only the factual dimension of a subject, but also its emotional texture. This in turn may touch the audience at an affective as well as a cognitive level.

Whilst their creators may have claimed otherwise, examples of *Cinéma direct* do indeed blend more objective treatments of their material with more subjective technical elements. Films belonging to the movement can be easily recognised by the distinctive aspects of their look and sound. Additionally, *Cinéma direct* also had an anthropological philosophy at its heart that determined the movement's subjects. Taking inspiration from the work of documentarist Jean

²⁷ 'Like the orator of old, the documentarian's concern is to win an audience's assent, not serve as an "information transfer" device' (Nicholls, 2016: 155).

Rouch and the French movement of *Cinéma vérité*, members of the *équipe française* were deeply motivated to create documentaries that recorded the societal preoccupations and customs unique to Québec society. Québécois filmmaker Claude Jutra, one of the initial and key exponents of *Cinéma direct*, spent time with Rouch in Africa filming the anthropological documentary *Le Niger, jeune république* (1961), a film which focussed upon the festivities associated with the Nigerian celebration of independence. This project proved to be hugely influential both for Jutra's own work and his *Cinéma direct* contemporaries. Documentaries belonging to the movement cast humble Québécois cultural events as moments that unite society around a common goal or activity, suggesting a positive social and quasi-spiritual cohesion. The NFB's corpus offers many examples of documentary whose point of departure was a societal ritual. *Les Raquetteurs* (Gilles Groulx and Michel Brault, 1958), often cited as the first example of a *Cinéma direct* documentary, investigates the rituals of the annual snow festival in the Québec town of Sherbrooke. *Golden Gloves* (Gilles Groulx, 1961) documents the participants of a popular amateur boxing tournament and explores the performative and ritualistic nature of boxing. The documentary's treatment of its subjects suggests that the ancient practice of ceremony around which participants gather is one that is still present in contemporary Québec society. These documentaries demonstrate the desire to create and record profound social commentary through the filming of shared activities around which society can congregate. *Pour la suite du monde* (Pierre Perrault, 1963), a monumental landmark of the *Cinéma direct* movement, demonstrates the tendency of Québec documentary to juxtapose more objective treatments of its subjects with more subjective forms of dramatisation in the portrayal of social ritual. The documentary focuses upon the residents of Île aux Coudres, a remote island in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, as they re-enact the rituals associated with the lost art of whale-hunting. Perrault's focus on the traditions of Québec rural landscapes and life is reminiscent of the 'priest films' of the early twentieth century. However, unlike the films of Father Tessier, which sought to limit independent thought and knowledge, Perrault's work is not motivated by the need to control Québec's moral conscience, rather by a more honest desire to capture a more pluralistic essence of the physical, social, historical and cultural connections between Quebeckers and their surroundings,

whether rural or urban. By asking the islanders to re-enact their dying traditions, Perrault blurs the line between fiction and non-fiction and underscores the performative nature of all film, including documentaries. *Pour la suite du monde* thus acts as a microcosm of the contradiction and tension between the aim of a direct and immediate capturing of reality and the inevitable manipulation (to a greater or lesser degree) of the subject material for the sake of creating a more engaging and provocative piece of film.

During the 1970s and moving into the 1980s, documentarists in Québec became less concerned with the specifically French-Canadian rituals and unifying cultural heritage of the province and more interested in the political and social concerns of Canada's and Québec's marginalised social groups. This shift is echoed by the NFB programme of films entitled Challenge for Change.²⁸ The programme, active between 1967 and 1980, produced around 160 Anglophone and 40 Francophone films that broadly focussed upon the diversity of Canadian society and the lives, hitherto under-represented or ignored, of the socially and politically marginalised. Of the Francophone films made under the programme, *Les filles du Roy* (Gilles Carle, 1974) exemplifies the new desire of Québécois documentarists to question assumptions commonly made surrounding the apparent egalitarianism of contemporary Québec. *Les filles du Roy* refers to the young French women recruited by Louis XIV to colonise Québec in the seventeenth century. Historically, the women have been misunderstood and misrepresented by patriarchal society as prostitutes, sullyng their reputation and role in the creation of Québec and building an ingrained misogyny into the societal fabric of Québec from the province's very inception. Carle's documentary juxtaposes the legacy of *Les filles du Roy* with the shifting identities and status of women in a rapidly changing Québec society, contrasting new-found freedoms with the persisting influences of patriarchy.

The ability of the Québec documentary to meet the needs of audiences who wish to learn more about their society and the world around them has ensured the genre's continued popularity as an invaluable tool for social investigation. The events of *la Révolution tranquille* both enabled and reflected the intellectualising of Québec society, with a new generation of progressive

²⁸ In French, the programme was known as Société nouvelle.

thinkers emerging and demanding change.²⁹ This phenomenon is reflected in the NFB's extensive and ever-expanding catalogue of films that explore a vast number of diverse issues within both Québec and Canadian culture and society. Until 2012, the NFB made over 10,000 of its films publicly available through the CinéRothèque on Rue Saint-Denis in downtown Montréal.³⁰ Such an impressive body of work testifies to the integral part played by the Board and documentary film in the formation and study of modern-day conceptions of Québec and Canada and their discussion by its citizens, from its inception in 1939 to the present day. The NFB has also nurtured the talents of those who produce animated films, emerging as a globally recognised force in animated cinema. The successes of influential filmmakers such as Norman McLaren who have produced experimental, abstract and socially-engaged animations demonstrate how the boundaries between entertainment and education can be successfully traversed. Since 1998, Montréal has hosted an annual documentary film festival under the banner *Rencontres internationales du documentaire de Montréal*, an event that consolidates Montréal's status as a hub for the production and appreciation of documentary film. The documentary also occupies a strong position within Québec's LGBT film scene. Montréal's *Image + Nation* film festival regularly showcases both domestic and international documentaries relating to LGBT experiences. This evidence of a sustained and thriving documentary scene indicates how Québec's LGBT population has employed the genre to engage with questions relating to the political, societal and personal experiences of local and global LGBT communities.

From its inception at the start of the Second World War, the NFB has repeatedly served to mediate and reflect upon crises. Notable among these have been issues relating to Québec's political, social and linguistic identity and the complex and sensitive question of independence. Denys Arcand has reflected upon Québec's nationalist sentiments in two very different documentaries. An

²⁹ The intellectualising of Québec society was helped in particular by the changes to the education system made from the early 1960s onwards by the Québec government. During this era, the responsibility for education was taken away from the Catholic Church and brought under the control of the secular provincial government. The pre-university institution of the *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel* was established in 1967, followed by the creation and gradual expansion across the province of the multiple campuses of the public University of Québec.

³⁰ The NFB was forced to close the CinéRothèque owing to federal budget cuts by the Conservative Harper government.

oblique treatment of the sovereignty question, *On est au coton* (1970), records workers at a Québec cotton factory to produce a critique of the working conditions and apparent repression endured by Francophone workers. Filmed in the wake of the failed referendum of 1980, *Le confort et l'indifférence* (1981) focusses on the political rhetoric and wrangling of politicians on both sides of the sovereignty debate. These films are just two of a large corpus of NFB documentaries devoted to the question of Québec independence.³¹ The NFB has also reacted to crises involving First Nations issues of indigeneity and identity. In response to the Oka crisis of 1990, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (Alanis Obomsawin, 1993) successfully unpicks the issues that provoked the crisis and questions Canada's treatment of its First Nations. Obomsawin's film went on to win the prize for Best Canadian Feature at the 1993 Toronto International Film festival.

The specific development and strong position of the documentary as a genre in Québec cinema provided a favourable context for the production of HIV/AIDS-related documentary. The 1980s witnessed a shift in the focus of Québec documentarists towards a more pluralistic envisioning of their society that revealed and explored the different marginalised subgroups of the population and the particular set of issues and problems they faced. This key shift is one in which documentaries relating to homosexuality and HIV/AIDS could easily find their place. The principles underpinning the development of the documentary in Québec, including the promotion of a binding sense of unity in the face of adversity, the power of the spoken word and the desire to reveal the factual and emotional truths of any given situation (through creative intervention or otherwise) provided a positive basis for cinematic consideration of the AIDS crisis. In particular, the inclinations of the documentary towards rational and thorough investigation could effectively dispel factual inaccuracies that, for the sake of false impressions of safety from the virus, made scapegoats of PLWHAs.

The genre of the documentary could prove particularly capable of tackling some of the more disturbing questions raised by the AIDS crisis, including those

³¹ The relationship between the NFB and the documentaries related to the question of independence that it supported has at times been strained. Upon its completion in 1970, the Board refused to screen *On est au coton*, citing its overtly political (pro-independence) message and fearing any aggravation of the already tense political climate that culminated in the October Crisis. Though bootleg copies of the film circulated for years, Arcand's film was only released by the Board in its full, unedited form in 2004.

related to illness, suffering and death. In *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, Vivian Sobchack offers a polemical reflection on the generalised reluctance of the contemporary Western documentary to confront and reveal the phenomenon of death. She notes, however, that documentaries about HIV/AIDS form the exception to her theory, and demonstrates how the genre has been used by documentarists to transgress social taboos surrounding AIDS-related death by recording and thus reintroducing elements of physical human suffering into predominant AIDS discourses.³² HIV/AIDS-related documentaries do not necessarily have to expose a specifically physical form of suffering to transgress social taboos surrounding HIV-related death. In fact, the genre of the documentary offers filmmakers a host of different potential approaches with which to define and examine some of the ethical, emotional and philosophical (as well as physical) anguish provoked by the AIDS crisis. On the one hand, the genre could allow a more subjective observation of the crisis that reveals the emotions of those touched by HIV and their perspective on the crisis. Conversely, the genre could also permit a more factual and methodical investigation of HIV/AIDS via those working towards the causes of PLWHAs. In either situation, the documentary offers the possibility of avoiding ill-informed and problematic responses inspired by the discourses of religion and science and rhetorical evasion, in favour of a braver, more constructive and nuanced interaction with the AIDS crisis and those it affected. To ascertain the varying responses of the NFB filmmakers to the AIDS crisis as it unfolded in Québec, this chapter will initially examine independently-produced *Mortel désir* (Mario Dufour, 1992); this documentary will then be compared and contrasted with two NFB-produced films, *Médecins de cœur* (Tahani Rached, 1993) and *Quand l'amour est gai* (Laurent Gagliardi, 1994).

***Mortel désir* (Mario Dufour, 1992)**

Perhaps surprisingly, the NFB did not produce Québec's first HIV/AIDS-related documentary. Directed by Mario Dufour and released in 1992, *Mortel désir* was

³² 'In the present context it is worth noting also that the political activism surrounding AIDS (and the films dealing with it) have consistently attempted to de-medicalize and de-technologize the illness, the process of dying, and death so that these cannot be quarantined as "institutional" problems' (Sobchack, 2004: 231).

produced independently by Productions Vent d'Est. However, whilst the NFB may not have provided creative input, they did provide financial input, with the film's credits indicating that Dufour obtained financial assistance from the NFB's Programme d'aide au cinéma indépendant, as well as from Telefilm Canada, a federal cultural funding body, and Radio-Québec (known today as Télé-Québec). Little information is available concerning Dufour's biography. The programme that accompanied a screening of his documentary in 1995 at Laval University describes him merely as a 'jeune réalisateur québécois' (Laval University, 1995). It would appear that *Mortel désir* was the only feature-length film of any sort that he ever directed. Dufour's film is an in-depth exploration of some fifteen Montrealers and their experiences and emotions as PWLHAs and non-PWLHAs. Through filming and collating a series of interviews and vignettes with a wide range of interviewees, he constructs a mosaic of the hopes, fears, problems and questions that HIV has provoked across the city's population and simultaneously debunks some of the prominent societal and emotional misconceptions associated with HIV. The release details of *Mortel désir* begin to suggest the kind of public Dufour sought to address. The film was originally created as a two-part documentary for television, broadcast on Radio-Québec in 1991. The first half, entitled *Je t'aime à la vie*, can stand alone and be understood separately from the second half, entitled *Je t'aime à la mort*. Then, in 1992, Dufour edited his made-for-TV documentary into a single film for cinematic release, being screened for an indeterminate run in December 1992 at the now-defunct Cinéma Elysée and at a charity screening organised by the Centre d'Action Sida Montréal (Femmes) in December 1992 at Université du Québec à Montréal. The unique structure of *Mortel désir* would suggest that Dufour sought to appeal to as wide an audience as possible via the medium of television as well as via cinema.

The hypothesis that Dufour sought to address a broader audience is bolstered by an analysis of the film's interviewees. Dufour recruited participants for his documentary by placing advertisements in Montréal's newspapers (*La Presse*, 1990). This markedly impartial and democratic approach to protagonist selection is indicative of his desire to create a film that was as representative as possible of the whole of Montréal society and its varying views and experiences of HIV/AIDS. As a result, Dufour's interviewees are varied in age, profession, class, location, gender and sexuality. The specific nature of their experiences with

the AIDS crisis are also highly varied; some have been infected by HIV, whilst others have experienced the virus vicariously through the infection of a loved one, or have had no direct contact with HIV at all. The remarkable diversity of Dufour's interviewees testifies to his wish to refute the idea that HIV was a phenomenon of concern only to those demographics principally affected by the virus and to show that, on the contrary, HIV was a phenomenon of great public significance requiring frank, all-inclusive discussion. The diversity of the documentary's interviewees and the variety of the feelings they express render *Mortel désir* both a factual investigation of the realities of the AIDS crisis and a sympathetic exploration of the emotional experiences provoked by the virus.

Contradicting misconceptions of those affected by HIV/AIDS

The general involvement of the whole of Québec society in the AIDS crisis is underlined by the characteristics and thoughts of the film's fifteen subjects, eight of whom appear in the first half, and seven in the second. In the first instance, their age range is wide; a teenager, young adults, people of middle-age, and more mature people in their 50s and 60s are amongst those filmed by Dufour. Each interviewee, regardless of age, openly discusses their relationship with HIV, thus dispelling the popular perception of the virus as a phenomenon exclusive to younger generations. The speakers also come from a diverse range of professions and exhibit a wide variety of personal and professional interests. Maxime is an aspiring musician and Charles an artist, whilst Luc is a yuppie and Pauline a sexual health worker. Some people's professions remain unspecified. The speakers succeed in demonstrating that people's jobs cannot be used as criteria in determining who should be concerned by HIV/AIDS. The same holds true for their associated and presumed lifestyles and economic and class status. Some protagonists, such as Charles the artist, speak with a degree of educated eloquence, whilst others such as Lee-Ann express themselves in an altogether more colloquial, informal kind of Québécois French.

The locations in which the protagonists are filmed constitute another key variation. The coverage of the AIDS crisis as seen in the Québec press reinforced the connection between HIV and gay men. Over-emphasising this relationship risks inaccurate ghettoisation of the virus, leading to misguided cultural and

official responses to HIV/AIDS that seek to symbolically confine the virus to one particular area. Counteracting such misunderstanding, the different locations used by Dufour, though not intrinsically connected to the interlocutors' characters, subtly suggest that HIV/AIDS can be discussed by anyone, anywhere. For example, Maxime the teenager is filmed talking by the shore of the lake situated on the Île-Notre-Dame. The lake and its pavilion are popular with bathers of all ages in the summer months. Carole, the sister of Alain, is pictured tending the grave of her brother at the Cimetière Saint-Georges in Longueuil. Luc is seen in conversation in front of the headquarters of La Banque Laurentienne on Avenue McGill College in the city's financial district, then later with his friend Stéphanie at the mall in the Eaton Centre. Thérèse H meanwhile is captured playing mini-golf at the now-defunct Centre de golf Bourassa in Anjou. Dufour does film some protagonists at locations in Montréal's gay Village and thus does not seek to deny the connection between HIV, MSM and the places they frequent. However, by constantly varying the settings of his film, he succeeds in moving HIV beyond the perimeters of the Village and out across Montréal Island and beyond. The use of these locations, many of them recognisable landmarks, immediately underscores the documentary's relevance to a local Montréal and Québec audience, thus emphasising the ubiquity of HIV/AIDS across all sections of society.

Two particular binary statuses that have heavily defined popular responses to the AIDS crisis are gender and sexuality. Once more, Dufour makes a concerted effort to question the accuracy and validity of approaching HIV as an issue affecting solely gay men. Of the fifteen interlocutors, eight are male and seven female. This split is representative of the gender divide as observed in Québec society, rather than that observed in the figures relating to the province's HIV transmission data. It would also appear that Dufour employed an egalitarian approach when selecting the PLWHAs he wished to interview. Thérèse H, Caroline and Thérèse D are three of the documentary's six PLWHA protagonists. The relatively simple feature of gender equality allows *Mortel désir* to strongly counteract the presumption of HIV/AIDS being a disease exclusive to men. The reported behaviour of Dufour's interlocutors also strongly questions false presumptions regarding the connection between HIV and sexuality. Of the fifteen protagonists, ten provide verbal evidence that they engage in heterosexual acts, or that they at least have done so in the past. Conversely, three state that they

engage in homosexual acts, or, again, that they at least have done so in the past. Two speakers, Carole and André, make no allusion to their sexuality at all, and one interlocutor, Florent, proves to be sexually ambiguous: he has a daughter, but is interviewed in a sauna where men have sex with men. What this breakdown demonstrates is that the number of those who claim to be heterosexual far outweighs those whom the audience can assume to be homosexual. Dufour's choice of subjects is therefore a more faithful reflection of the complexities of the male/female, heterosexual/homosexual split as it exists in Québec society than the raw statistical data relating to the sexuality of those living with HIV in Québec.

Dufour's remarkably broad choice of protagonists was noted and appreciated by Québec's mainstream press for its re-humanising of the AIDS crisis.³³ However, Dufour's strongly egalitarian selection of protagonists could also be criticised. This thesis has already established how the persistent focus on MSM, in particular gay men, and their connection to HIV, resulted in the portrayal of AIDS as an exclusively homosexual affliction and thus gay men as complicit and careless carriers of disease. However, conversely, Cindy Patton (1990: 101) Leo Bersani (1987: 202-03) and Nicole Vitellone (2008: 59-60) have all highlighted the dangers of making concerted efforts to portray the AIDS crisis as a phenomenon *not* largely confined to the discrete social groups that it did undeniably principally effect. Dubbed by Patton as the 'rhetoric of "no-one is safe"' and by Vitellone as the 'heterosexualisation of AIDS', the painting of HIV as an indiscriminate virus, that can strike straights as well as gays, can go so far as to erase homosexuals entirely from the crisis in which they were deeply implicated. Numerous public information campaigns fell into this particular trap, including the British 'don't die of ignorance' series of advertisements that appealed exclusively to white, straight heterosexuals, the demographic least likely to be touched by HIV, and ignored the gay men desperately in need of information and support. Evidence of this tendency can be seen in the Québec press; in 1992, HIV/AIDS prevention posters produced by the government of Québec were criticised by HIV support groups for predominantly and almost exclusively using images of a white, heterosexual couple, 'deux personnes qui risquent le moins d'avoir le sida' (Noël,

³³ 'En montrant des gens d'âges, de mentalités, de professions, et de milieux sociaux très variés, *Mortel désir* montre, mieux que n'importe quelles statistiques, à quel point le sida ne regarde pas où il frappe' (Fourlanty, 1992).

1992a). However, *Mortel désir* shows no such signs of disregarding gay men. Over the course of his film, Dufour strongly demonstrates how HIV can and does touch both straights and gays, affording sympathetic treatments to all PLWHAs and protagonists, regardless of their sexuality. He successfully avoids both the vilification and the disregard of gay men and their position in the AIDS crisis, two extremes that frequently defined popular reactions to the crisis. The diverse characteristics of all of Dufour's interviewees and the careful manner of their selection broadly re-humanises the issue of HIV/AIDS as one that must be faced together by all members of society.

Revealing and amplifying the emotional experiences provoked by HIV/AIDS

The physical and social characteristics of the interviewees featured in *Mortel désir* debunk a host of factual misconceptions surrounding HIV/AIDS and the range of its impacts. Additionally, the interviewees shed much light on some of the emotional experiences provoked by HIV. For example, Maxime is a seemingly HIV-negative teenager who discusses his dislike of condoms, in particular their tendency to detract from the spontaneity of his sexual adventures. Whilst he does express his fear of HIV, the power of his libido (or, at the very least, his desire to appear sexually confident) overrides any sense of sexual caution. His frank opinions on the subject, and the brashness with which they are aired, contravene all the rules of safer sexual behaviour. However, Dufour, in line with his desire to create a realistic meditation on the place of HIV/AIDS in Québec society, seeks not to pass judgement but rather to allow Maxime to freely express his opinions. The teenager's remarks succeed in making an important point; in spite of the very obvious potential dangers of unprotected sex, it is naïve to expect every Quebecker (particularly younger members of society engaged in exploring their developing sexualities) to use protection in every one of their sexual encounters. The simple and naturalistic cinematic treatment of Maxime is typical of Dufour's capturing of all his protagonists. Maxime is recorded speaking in a close-up, shallow focus shot that gives total primacy to his physical presence, his facial expressions and the spontaneity and impact of his words. These shots are juxtaposed with mid-focus sequences that depict him socialising with his friends.

The combination of close-up and contextualising shots allows both the importance of the protagonists' opinions and their individuality to come to the fore, fostering a remarkable sense of directness and immediacy.³⁴

Lee-Ann is the protagonist who opens the first half of *Mortel désir*. Her profession is never made clear, but she is filmed in a nightclub and may have a career as a barmaid or dancer. Speaking to camera with a thick Québécois accent but with great energy and informality, she describes how she discovered that her partner had lied to her about his HIV-positive status, a discovery that provoked feelings of shock, sadness and mistrust.³⁵ Her words may initially seem unrefined and inarticulate. However, Dufour's inclusion of Lee-Ann and his focus on her as the opening subject of his documentary demonstrate that all those who have experienced HIV/AIDS deserve the right to speak and be heard, regardless of any presumptions as to their social status. There is a certain unexpected profundity in Lee-Ann's words, as she identifies the shift that has occurred in her conception of love, and in her view of how she wishes to be loved, as a consequence of her encounter with HIV/AIDS. The film treats with respect the responses to the disease that can emerge from what may seem to be the most ordinary of people and settings and the ways in which such individuals have risen to the demands of their situation.³⁶ Lee-Ann's words and character strongly establish from the outset the documentary's message that HIV/AIDS is a phenomenon that has serious implications for all of society, for those within the demographics readily associated with the virus but just as importantly for those outside those demographics who might make the mistake of considering themselves beyond its reach.

Mortel désir makes great efforts to nuance the relationship between HIV/AIDS and gay men. Nevertheless, Dufour does not deny this connection entirely. Two of the documentary's protagonists, Charles and Ivan, are gay men living with HIV/AIDS. However, in contrast to the treatment of gay men by the

³⁴ 'Placés devant les confidences terriblement intimes qui nous arrivent de vraies personnes sur écran, on est tour à tour étonné, gêné, provoqué, choqué, attendri, bousculé, ému aux larmes. Mais ennuyé, jamais!' (Roberge, 1992).

³⁵ 'J'étais vraiment... parce que, c'est ça, là, je voyais qu'il gars que je croyais qui m'aimait... il me fait ça ! C'est comme quasiment mettre un gun à ma tête à toutes [sic] les soirs et jouer une roulette russe avec moi... c'est pas ça aimer quelqu'un en tout cas, ce que je pense que c'est, maintenant je crois pas que j'ai déjà goûté à l'amour, là, après cette expérience-là, là ?'

³⁶ 'Mais là il t'arrive des affaires de même dans ta vie, c'est pour te faire évoluer, tsé ? Pis moi, c'est ça, j'ai eu l'impression d'avoir évolué comme un jet supersonique avec cette histoire-là, tsé ?'

mainstream press, Dufour gives his gay interviewees the opportunity to fully tell their side of the story, in turn revealing some of the experiences of what it actually means to be a gay man living with HIV/AIDS. This sympathetic treatment of the two men as individuals with personalities, aspirations and fears re-humanises impressions of MSM PLWHAs and discourages their scapegoating as dangerous and abnormal individuals. Charles is an artist who, since discovering his condition, produces works of art that reflect his feelings towards his HIV-positive status. Using his works as a talking point, Charles reveals his inner thoughts on the essence of desire and the excitement that it gives him.³⁷ He has no qualms about discussing the details of his sexuality and sensuality and the desires he still very much has towards men and the male form. His HIV-positive status has not resulted in him 'decommissioning' the sexual components of his life. However, he also acknowledges that his condition has obliged him to reconsider the value and meaning of his sexual encounters.³⁸ Charles hints at HIV as a form of wake-up call that has helped him and, as he implies, other gay men, to realise that life may offer more than the sexual hedonism that had at least partially defined the gay lifestyle prior to the emergence of HIV. However, Charles' conclusion is not one that seeks to judge and condemn his own actions or those of anyone else. His description of HIV/AIDS as an opportunity for personal growth is both surprising and encouraging, and shows his refusal to be defined and confined by his condition. The refusal of all of the protagonists featured in *Mortel désir* to pass judgement on those living with HIV/AIDS was positively acknowledged by critics upon the film's release:

Au défi de la lutte sociale contre le sida, *Mortel désir* ouvre de nouveaux horizons tournés vers la compréhension, appuie l'esprit d'une plus grande tolérance, et propose une toute autre approche sur le plan émotif et sexuel. Et c'est par la voix des intervenants que ces

³⁷ 'Parlant du désir, moi j'ai toujours été un type amoureux et désiré... j'adore ce moment-là qui est le moment qui se situe entre le désir et de... avant qui était la consommation ou l'aboutissement. Toute cette période-là du désir, c'est quelque chose que je vis encore, très intensément, tsé c'est comme j'ai toujours aimé les torsos [...] Le sida aussi nous apprend sur l'orientation et la qualité extraordinaire de ce sentiment-là qui est de désirer.'

³⁸ 'Notre comportement était devenu trop... trop fin-de-siècle, trop consommation de l'avoir, de l'avoir, même avoir un number que tu ramasses dans un bar un soir au lieu de resplendir sa vie pis de vivre sa vie.'

considérations prennent une signification totalement dépourvue d'une quelconque approche didactique ou moraliste. (Castiel, 1993)

This particular reaction suggests that emotive, potentially damaging reactions to HIV were commonplace across society, to such an extent that the evidence of any other approach being employed to understand the AIDS crisis was uncommon, surprising and welcomed.

A similar assertion of power over HIV can be observed in the two-fold depiction of Ivan. Ivan, a gay PLWHA whose condition is markedly worse than that of Charles, appears on two different occasions. During his first interview, it would appear that he is experiencing a bout of illness and this interview is filmed indoors. During this first sequence, Ivan speaks of the things he has come to realise in the wake of his diagnosis and of his desire to be a little less ill, so that he may take advantage of his newfound awareness.³⁹ His remark suggests just a fraction of the emotional and mental journey that his illness has provoked and the suggestion that he may not be well enough to complete it, renders his words all the more heart-rending. During the last portion of the interview, he turns to look directly into the lens of the camera. His face, expressions, gaze and words completely fill the screen, as if he were bursting out into the world of the viewer. The qualities of this moment allow his words to convey the distilled essence of the myriad experiences, difficulties and questions provoked by living with AIDS and the traumatic experiences that he has endured. The close-up scenes of rapidly flowing water that Dufour intercuts with the interview evoke the relentless flow of life towards unknown destinations, whilst the water itself symbolises Ivan's expressed desire for a fulfilling form of wholeness. Ivan's second appearance shows that his wishes have come true and his health has improved enough for him to spend time outside. In conversation, he confirms that, since his previous interview, he has been able to experience a profound moment of intimacy and

³⁹ 'Oui, j'apprends... à être, à ne pas être qu'une image, qu'un look, appris à... avoir une personnalité, avoir un... de l'aspiration pour quelque chose, de clair, de beau, de propre, de profond [...] J'ai juste envie d'être bien, tsé. C'est ce que j'essaie de faire à tous les jours, j'essaie d'être bien. C'est pas toujours évident mais j'essaie d'être bien. J'y arrive, je pense que j'y arrive. À quelque part, j'y arrive. Je sais plus.'

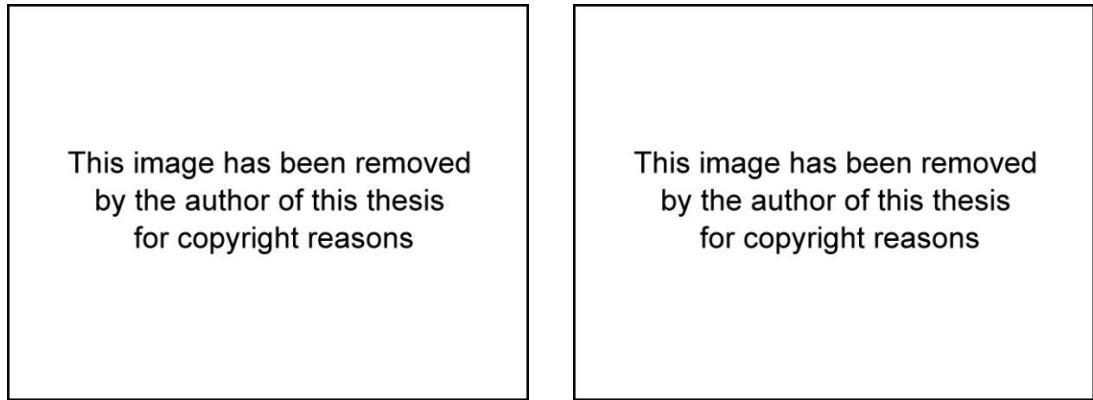


Illustration 1

happiness.⁴⁰ He describes how he met someone with whom he made love, an exhilarating and satisfying experience that meant far more than any casual sexual encounter. The clarity with which Ivan expresses himself is deeply touching. The simplicity of his narrative, and of the words he uses to describe the surprising pleasure of willing self-abandonment ('je me laissais toucher', 'je me laissais caresser') lend his story a tone of moving sincerity. His uncomplicated reflection on what it means to make love is tender and unembarrassed and provides a strong and credible counteraction to the overwhelmingly morbid imagery surrounding those living with HIV/AIDS. The interview demonstrates the vitality, the yearning and the resilient sense of hope that can survive the experience of living with AIDS.

A final revelation at the very end of the film once more changes the significance of Ivan's character and story. Another of the documentary's protagonists, Ivan's brother, André, is filmed on the bow of a boat on the Saint Lawrence River, discussing his brother's life and their relationship. These boat scenes are intercut with the scenes depicting Ivan describing his newfound sense of contentedness and peace. Through use of the cut, Dufour orchestrates a form of conversation between the two brothers that transcends time and space (illustration 1). It is only when André is eventually seen holding a small box that

⁴⁰ 'J'ai rencontré quelqu'un [...] pis il m'a ramené chez lui, pis on a fait l'amour. Enfin j'ai fait l'amour, c'était super bon ! [...] il y avait longtemps que je n'avais pas fait l'amour comme ça. Et pis je me sentais libre, je me sentais pas coupable de rien, je me sentais très à l'aise [...] Je me laissais toucher, je me laissais caresser, je me laissais faire pis y avait pas de dégoût, aucune pensée dans sa tête... Franchement... ça m'a surpris.'

the viewer realises that Ivan has died, and that his brother is about to scatter his ashes into the river. The cutting back and forth between Ivan and André is further punctuated by home movie footage of the pair playing together as children. The footage gradually moves further back in time, until the viewer is able to see Ivan as a new-born baby with older brother André. For the film's final scene, André sings the words to one of Ivan's favourite songs, the French version of the theme tune to Gerry Anderson's 1960s children's classic *Fireball XL5*. As André's voice begins to crack as he holds back his tears, the camera pans away from him out towards the open water. The kitsch quality of the song, combined with the serenity of the river setting and the focus of the camera on André's face and voice, lends the scene a strong emotional charge. The gradual way in which Dufour reveals the truth of the situation through the use of the cut involves the viewer closely in the emotional upheaval of the moment. Ivan's ashes confront the viewer with a potent reminder of the fragility and ephemerality of the human condition. André's scattering of his brother's ashes appears real and unperformed; captured by Dufour, the scene also obliges the viewer to confront the tragic impact of HIV/AIDS and the grief occasioned by the loss, and in particular, the untimely loss, of a loved one. The intercalated home movie footage reinforces the portrayal of the loving families and countless shattered lives that lie behind the impersonal statistics of HIV diagnoses and AIDS-related deaths.

The motif: the dancers

The stories of the interviewees studied above are just some of those recounted by the various protagonists in *Mortel désir*. Complementing these stories, Dufour borrows from the world of performing arts as a means of further counteracting negative impressions of HIV/AIDS. A prominent structuring feature of the first half of *Mortel désir* is a series of highly stylised, embellished and visually expressive scenes, interwoven through the interview sequences as a visual motif, that feature a couple engaged in a dance. The dancers first appear at the very beginning of the first half of the film, by the statue of George-Étienne Cartier in Parc Jeanne-Mance at the foot of Mont Royal. The pair are engaging in what is colloquially known as the 'Tam-Tams', a weekly dance festival that has taken place annually throughout the summer months in Montréal since the 1960s.

Anyone is free to congregate on the lawns surrounding the Cartier statue off Avenue du Parc and to play in an organic drum circle, dancing to the beat of the music or absorbing the laid-back, smoke-filled atmosphere. The dancers, a young man and a young woman, are partaking in a distinctly interpretive form of dance, characterised by close body contact, fluidity and an organic form of sensuality. The music to which they perform is a blend of the live sound of the drums and synthesised bass guitars and panpipes. The overall tone of the scene is one of sensual ritual.

The next time the viewer encounters the dancers, they have moved indoors to a lightly furnished studio, where the lighting and colours are predominantly light and breezy. In contrast to the relative stasis of the camera associated with the interviewees, the camera that comes to be associated with the dancers is subjective and agile, mirroring the moves of the dancing duo with great energy. The music used in the studio is now completely post-synchronized and is pressing in nature. The rhythm both reflects and predicts the passion that emerges from the two bodies that sway and caress each other, hinting at a rising level of arousal. The synchronisation of the bodies and their mirrored movements, exaggerated by the movement of the camera and the urgent soundtrack, layers the scene with a sense of erotic anticipation. The outward appearance of the two dancers clearly suggests to the viewer that the pair is a heterosexual one. However, the short hair of the female dancer and the androgynous qualities of the male dancer's face and hairstyle contribute to a certain desexualisation of the dancing pair. The camera's continued emphasis on the unified movement of the dancers' relatively well-clothed limbs (and not on any explicitly sexual acts) lends the sequences a universality to which anyone can relate in terms of the movements and sensuality expressed.

Over the course of the first half of *Mortel désir*, the viewer is treated to a total of four indoor dance sequences, across which the dancers convey a developing story via their movements and the accompanying music. Whilst the first scene is overflowing with passion and anticipation, the second strongly conveys a change in the mood of the pair. The male dancer is uncommunicative, much to the frustration of the female dancer, who tries in vain to instigate some form of reaction. The third scene constitutes a role reversal of the second scene: the male dancer appears to have realised the upset that his distance has caused

his partner. He attempts to make peace with her, however she is closed to his advances. The final indoor scene shows that, through communication, the couple have reconciled and have returned to a state of contentedness, dancing with fluidity and joy.

The sequences fulfil a variety of functions. In the first instance, they provide a breathing space for the interviewees' feelings to achieve their full impact and for the viewer to pause and consolidate what they have witnessed. They also set the tone of *Mortel désir* by acting as an expressive microcosm of what the documentary principally advocates: a universal openness to communication about intimacy and desire and a corresponding rejection of silence. The dancing couple can also be read as an idealised celebration of human sensuality, sexuality and kinship, thus counteracting the negative impacts exerted by HIV/AIDS on contemporary conceptions of sex and intimacy. Their performance succeeds in distilling and showcasing a host of intertwined feelings that lie at the heart of emotional reactions to HIV/AIDS, including passion, rejection, reconciliation and harmony and thus demonstrates the constructive application of metaphor in the understanding of the illness and its emotional realities. The recurrence of these dance sequences therefore reinforces the documentary's treatment of HIV/AIDS as a multifaceted and far-reaching emotional experience as opposed to a simplistic, one-dimensional issue of sex and morality. In relation to Grierson's conception of the documentary, they demonstrate how the genre can indeed record events using an effective blend of objective and subjective approaches; the agile filming of the pair captures the immediacy of their shared emotions, whilst their arrangement as a series of patterned scenes underscores both the emotional journey of the dancers and the overarching mood of the film.

The content, focus and tone of *Mortel désir* suggest that Dufour sought to engage with as large an audience as possible. His choice of interviewees and the wide variety of angles from which they consider HIV, as well as the TV-friendly format of the documentary and its interrogation of the virus as an emotional issue, make *Mortel désir* a documentary that can speak to people from all walks of life, regardless of gender, age, social standing and sexuality. His documentary provides a means of provoking a society-wide conversation about HIV/AIDS that is relatively daring, frank and, perhaps most importantly, inclusive.

***Médecins de cœur* (Tahani Rached, 1993)**

The focus of *Médecins de cœur*, the work of the Egyptian-born female filmmaker Tahani Rached, and the first film concerning HIV/AIDS produced by the NFB, is entirely different from that of *Mortel désir*. This documentary has as its primary focus the exploration of HIV/AIDS through the lens of a group of Montréal doctors who specialise in HIV/AIDS treatment. Having emigrated to Québec in 1966, Rached emerged during the 1980s and early 1990s as a prolific and respected documentary filmmaker within the NFB. During this period, she engaged with a diverse range of international and domestic social themes and phenomena, including the plight of Lebanese refugees in the wake of the war with Israel (*Beyrouth! «A défaut d'être mort»* [1983]), Haiti in the post-Duvalier era (*Bam Pay A! – Rends-moi mon pays!* [1986]), and the lives associated with a popular café in the deprived Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighbourhood of Montréal (*Au chic Resto Pop* [1990]). These works exhibit Rached's strong interest in documenting the lives of people trapped in difficult social and political situations. By 1993 she was thus already a seasoned documentarist and an activist with considerable experience in capturing and sympathising with the lives of marginalised people, both in Québec and elsewhere. In relation to those directly implicated in the AIDS crisis in Québec, Rached, as a non-white and, it seems, heterosexual female, might be considered as an outsider. However, as an outsider of a different kind, who had already proven herself to be sensitive and considerate towards a wide variety of marginalised people, Rached was well placed to produce a fair yet sympathetic treatment of those caught up in the AIDS crisis. As its title suggests, the interviewees featured in her documentary are principally medical professionals, most of them doctors attached to the Clinique médicale l'Actuel, a clinic based in Montréal's gay Village dedicated exclusively to the treatment of HIV/AIDS patients. Rached's camera documents the doctors in a wide range of professional roles and settings, depicting them in their offices with patients, in medical laboratories, at public health meetings, in academic institutions and at medical conferences. Wherever they are filmed, the doctors are consistently seen discussing the problems faced by those living with HIV/AIDS, including limited treatment options, confidentiality and disclosure, exclusion, homophobia and societal prejudice and indifference. These conversations may be held with other members of the medical profession or with those with a narrower understanding

of the epidemic, with the doctors seeking to identify solutions to AIDS-related medical and social issues and also with other medical practitioners less well-informed than themselves. Rached's principal protagonists are reliable, expert professionals who are able to calmly and methodically provide the facts of the AIDS crisis as far as they are known and to defuse some of the main prejudices surrounding the transmission of HIV/AIDS, its treatment and those it touches. Reviews of the documentary underline its success as an exercise in demystification and education:

Depuis toujours, l'Office National du Film s'ennorgueillit [sic] de sa section documentaire et avec raison. Mais avec un sujet aussi délicat que le sida, le danger de créer à tout prix l'événement veillait sans doute en sourdine. Rassurez-vous, il n'en est rien. *Médecins de cœur* est une œuvre sincère qui évite tout didactisme et tout larmoiement inutiles. On en ressort très informé et rempli d'un bel espoir. (*Fugues*, 1993)

This positive evaluation by *Fugues*, a publication well-placed to comment, underscores not only the educational credentials of Rached's documentary but also its human qualities. Indeed, the second element of the title, *de cœur*, emphasises the commitment and empathy that the doctors bring to their work with HIV/AIDS. The audience can therefore look forward to a documentary that blends a dispassionate matter-of-fact approach to the AIDS crisis with moments of more subjective emotional engagement.

Underscoring the doctors' rationality

The use of doctors as the film's central focus allows the truths about HIV/AIDS to be articulated by a group of people who embody credibility, logic and rationality. As well as approaching questions related to HIV/AIDS objectively in order to demolish certain misconceptions surrounding the disease, these knowledgeable and credible professionals also propose alternative models for dealing with the AIDS crisis. Rached's representation of the medical profession as the voice of

reason and truth could of course be challenged, and conflicts notably with Foucault's view of medical science as a form of social control.⁴¹ His conception of the medical profession as a form of police, excessive and conspiratorial though it may seem, may in some circumstances, as demonstrated in Chapter One, have an element of truth. When considered in relation to *Médecins de cœur*, however, it does not align with Rached's depiction of her group of doctors, who do not view themselves, nor are they represented as, agents of a conspiratorial state, operating in a prescriptive top-down manner in a spirit of ostracism and surveillance. Such perceptions are explicitly refuted by the doctors in their discussion of the tracing and forced identification of the sexual partners connected to known PLWHAs, a popular response to the AIDS crisis in some jurisdictions across North America that, from the perspective of its proponents, served as the most efficient means of controlling the spread of HIV. The doctors of the Clinique médicale l'Actuel, however, dismiss such responses as tantamount to the creation of a police state and a waste of energy and resources that would be better spent investing in medical care for PLWHAs, testifying to their status as rational and compassionate practitioners. She does however take care to acknowledge the divisive nature of HIV and the differences of opinion about it within the medical profession itself. One particular sequence depicts the more street-savvy doctors attached to the Clinique médicale l'Actuel arguing with a rural health professional, Dr David Roy, who is bewildered by the urban cohort's acceptance and continued support of Montréal's MSM and their sexual practices.

Much of the myth-busting achieved in *Médecins de cœur* is articulated by Dr Réjean Thomas. Thomas, who took the lead in establishing the Clinique médicale l'Actuel, is one of the documentary's key figures, whose words and actions consistently underscore the advantages of approaching HIV using compassionate science and the opposing disadvantages of approaching the virus from a starting point of irrational fear. Whenever Thomas is seen, he is always depicted engaging in an activity that aims to improve the lives of PLWHAs, working tirelessly and passionately for some of the many causes connected to the AIDS crisis. He is learned but approachable, authoritative but not authoritarian, and succeeds in discussing AIDS in a serious yet light-hearted

⁴¹ See Chapter One, pp.12-13.

manner. He comes across as a charismatic, almost heroic figure who is handsome, charming and confident in everything that he does. In line with Grierson's principles, Rached subtly employs different cinematic techniques that intensify Thomas's logic and credibility and add weight to his perspective on the various situations at hand. As compared with Dufour, she makes far greater use of editing and mise-en-scène to emphasise the messages of her protagonists and convey a more precise picture of several important aspects of the AIDS crisis. In one sequence featuring a meeting of the Commission scolaire catholique de Montréal (CSCM), she uses framing and intercutting to give weight to Thomas's arguments. First, school governors and interested parties are filmed as they engage in heated debate as to whether the schools under their jurisdiction should be allowed to install condom distributors in their buildings. Those with more emotive and religious reasons for refusing the proposal are captured in a series of close-up shots before, mid-way through the scene, the camera cuts to Thomas discussing the CSCM meeting on the other side of the Atlantic at the 1992 International AIDS Conference in Amsterdam. He speaks candidly and convincingly about the logic behind the proposal, in the process deconstructing the argument of the 'no vote' and underlining its naivety. An abrupt cut takes the viewer back to the CSCM scene, where after discussions that present the provision of condoms primarily in terms of the moral and spiritual corruption of youth, the proposal is rejected. The cut underscores the polarity between the two ways of approaching HIV/AIDS, covertly mocking as it does so, the less rational perspectives and making the case for dispassionate logic.

Throughout the film, Rached also uses newspaper clippings to highlight the fallaciousness of the mediations of HIV/AIDS produced by the Québec press and their often incendiary and sensationalist nature. In one instance, she films Thomas in his office reflecting upon the furore caused by the rumour that an HIV-positive prostitute had slept with multiple members of Montréal's National Hockey League team Les Canadiens de Montréal. The original newspaper article (taken from *La Presse*) appears briefly onscreen as extra-diegetic material, creating a striking visual conflict between the inflammatory article and the calm and collected figure of the doctor. As the article appears on screen, the gaze of the camera pans over it, mimicking the eye movements of a newspaper reader. Thomas meanwhile proceeds to deconstruct the article as a sexist piece of

journalism, tantamount to a witch hunt, which seeks maliciously to place all blame for the situation upon the prostitute and her supposedly reckless behaviour, rather than on the NHL players who did not think to use condoms. In the process, Thomas criticises the scapegoating of marginalised PLWHAs as well as the fundamentalist casting of HIV as an act of divine judgement against sinful behaviour, a reaction that was given new currency by the emergence of AIDS. The visual and ethical juxtaposition of the article with Thomas's critique obliges viewers to pass their own judgement on the situation. Their involvement is also heightened as they listen to Thomas's angry phone call to a journalist who either wrote the article or supports its assertions. The journalist is heard to concede the logic of the doctor's point of view, allowing Rached to further underline the need for a rational approach to HIV/AIDS and all the questions that it provokes. The inclusion of press material in her documentary demonstrates Rached's acute awareness of the misleading representations of HIV/AIDS in the Québec press and of their dangerous ability to foster climates of panic and blame. By incorporating real newspaper articles and real scandals, *Médecins de cœur* highlights how the AIDS crisis and its meanings have been constructed socially in a way that moralises the crisis and propagates discrimination and culpability.

In both these sequences, the camera is positioned so that viewers may feel as though they are a part of the events unfolding on screen. The shooting of Thomas in close-up and the framing of his head makes his face, and therefore his gestures and words, the centre of visual attention. In contrast, during the CSCM debate, the camera flicks around the room between speakers, mimicking the eye movements of those actually witnessing the discussion and creating a feeling of restless uncertainty. The focus and distance of the camera accord relatively less attention to the speakers' faces, thus subtly undermining and problematising their opinions. Techniques such as these are used throughout the documentary as a means of consistently prioritising the faces and gestures of preferred interlocutors and thus intensifying the impression of clarity and reason in their fact-based thinking.

Underscoring the doctors' emotionality

Médecins de cœur spends much of its time focussed upon the doctors discussing the facts of the AIDS crisis in clinical settings and situations that reaffirm their rational characters as medical professionals. However, Rached also dedicates some screen time to more intimate sequences that depict them expressing their emotional responses to HIV/AIDS in distinctly more private environments. If Thomas can be characterised as the energetic and effervescent public-facing star of the film, then Dr Michel Marchand can be seen as his mellower, more intimate counterpart. He speaks softly and with precision, conducting all aspects of his life with discretion and apparent humility. Though he, like Thomas, contributes to the heated discussions between the doctors around the treatment of PLWHAs, he is also filmed in the private space of what appears to be his home. Here, Marchand engages in impassioned discussion with a friend about the high cost of AZT to patients, imploring drug producers to invest their profits in further research, as well as the Québec government to fully cover the costs of drugs needed by PLWHAs.⁴² Such instances further counteract negative perceptions of the medical establishment by underscoring the difference between the profit-driven and monolithic pharmaceutical industry and individual doctors who, seeking to improve the situation of PLWHAs within a set of difficult constraints over which they had little control, were just as angry at the apparent greed and indifference of 'the establishment' as were PLWHAs. Periodically throughout the film, Rached splices extracts of a talking heads-style conversation recorded with Marchand, in which he expresses some of his personal reflections on the meanings and morals of the AIDS crisis. In these clips, the camera shifts between more distant and close-up shots that depict him relaxing on a settee in a loose-fitting green shirt. During the close-up shots, the close framing of his face and shallow focus of the camera give total primacy to his facial expressions, gestures and words. He

⁴² Québec's system of socialised medicine did not cover all eventualities faced by PLWHAs. At the time of the production of *Médecins de cœur*, the Québec government would only cover the prescription charges of PLWHAs who had been hospitalised by their condition, whilst those not hospitalised had to contribute financially (often greatly) to their treatment. Loopholes did exist that allowed PLWHAs to have their medication partially subsidised and reduce the financial burden of living with HIV, however these options were only available to those who knew how to 'play the game' and negotiate the bureaucracy of the Québec state. The high costs of AZT was reported in the Québec press (*The Gazette*, 1989). However, rather than focussing on the cost of the life-saving drug to patients unable to qualify for the drug, the article concentrated upon the financial burden that PLWHAs who did qualify for assistance posed to the Québec government.

speaks to someone who is slightly to the left of the camera, inviting the viewer to listen in closer. Only the sound of his voice is heard, rounding out the intimate qualities of the sequence. During the final montage of this conversation, Marchand expresses a broadly positive view of Québec society as one that is relatively pluralist and tolerant. However, he juxtaposes this opinion with what he perceives as a generalised loss of respect for the inestimable gift of life.⁴³ His words possess a clarity and simplicity that alert the viewer to his ability to approach HIV not only medically, but also philosophically, quasi-spiritually and always with personal humility, strengthening his status as ‘one of the good guys’. The approaches of Thomas and Marchand complement each other, demonstrating the need for doctors to respond to approach the AIDS crisis emotionally as well as rationally.

A further important feature contributing to the more emotive elements of *Médecins de cœur* is the revelation over the course of the documentary that first Thomas and then Marchand are themselves HIV-positive. Rached’s treatment of these revelations adds another level of depth to their characters and obliges the viewer to reconsider predominant archetypes of PLWHAs. Thomas’s HIV disclosure emerges unexpectedly and out of the blue. Seated at his desk in his office, discussing serostatus disclosure amongst PLWHAs in his usual effortless manner, he suddenly mentions how he himself found it difficult to disclose his status to his loved ones. He sheds a tear, takes a moment to collect his thoughts, then gets back to work. The disclosure is brief, dignified and matter-of-fact and its phrasing fairly opaque. There is no mention of the words *séropositif*, *sida*, *sidéen*, or *VIH*. It is through inference and his visible display of emotion that the viewer realises the implications of his words. The inference directly involves the viewer in the act of disclosure, creating a sense of intimacy and exchange. The revelation also suggests a personal motivation for the passion with which he seeks to improve the situation of fellow PLWHAs. As an AIDS doctor dealing with the condition himself, his portrayal adds depth and complexity to Rached’s presentation of those living with HIV/AIDS. The scene counteracts Foucault’s conception of the medical profession as a body of discriminatory surveillance by

⁴³ ‘On vit bien aujourd’hui [cependant] on a perdu le sens de la mort [...] je n’ai pas le droit de vivre, j’ai la responsabilité de vivre.’

demonstrating that doctors are also human beings who experience the same hopes, fears and problems as anyone else. Marchand's serostatus is revealed very differently. The final instalment of the 'green shirt' sequence is intercut with footage of another of the doctors, Clément Olivier, giving a eulogy at a funeral. As the intercutting continues, it transpires that, during the filming of the documentary, Marchand has died. The disclosure of Marchand's condition is even more oblique than that of Thomas; it is only through the funeral shots that the truth of the situation is conveyed. The editing and sequencing of events save the revelation that this was a death from AIDS until the very end of the film. This decision clearly signals the harsh reality of the illness whilst simultaneously limiting traces of sentimentality over the sadness of its outcomes. It can be read furthermore as Rached's way of demonstrating Marchand's mastery of his condition and his refusal to be defined and constrained by his HIV status. These disclosures, and the restrained manner in which they are both revealed and downplayed, underline the total dedication on the part of both doctors to the cause for which they were working and in which they were both intimately and directly involved. The dignified nature of both disclosures inspires a strong sense of admiration and respect for both Thomas and Marchand. In particular, the revealing of Marchand's fate highlights the tragedy of the AIDS crisis in a manner that emphasises a mingling of both sorrow and hope, as opposed to a sense of panic and helplessness.

The revelation of Marchand's death shares much in common with that of Ivan's death in *Mortel désir*. By gradually intercutting footage of their protagonists in happier and healthier times with footage depicting the aftermath of their deaths, and by withholding these reveals to the very end of the films, the disclosures of both deaths come as saddening surprises that provoke reflection on the mortality that ultimately defines the AIDS crisis. However, by juxtaposing their deaths with uplifting footage that portrays the protagonists' courage and resolve in the face of diversity, the filmmakers render these disclosures poignant rather than morbid, with both Marchand and Ivan becoming inspirational figures who can be admired for their bravery and serve as examples to follow.

The motif: the Parc de l'espoir

Médecins de cœur constitutes an active questioning and discrediting of some of the more sensationalist and judgemental reactions to the AIDS crisis. The choice of doctors as the documentary's protagonists lends Rached's enquiry a strong sense of credibility, whilst her treatment of the professionals in their private, as well as their public lives, creates a much-needed sense of intimacy that re-humanises perceptions of the crisis and of those trying to resolve it. Like Dufour in *Mortel désir*, Rached also uses a series of interwoven, expressive and often embellished scenes that come to symbolise and convey the key take-home messages of her documentary.

These scenes revolve around a small public space situated in Montréal's gay Village known as the Parc de l'espoir, a park that, over the course of the documentary, Rached depicts both objectively, as the film chronicles events that take place there, and subjectively, in terms of the park's figurative meanings. In one sequence, a group of around fifty protesters are filmed congregating at the Place des Arts, to commemorate the murder of gay Montrealer and PLWHA Joe Rose.⁴⁴ The group then parades down Rue Sainte-Catherine, accompanied by a police escort, and finishes in the Village, at a vacant lot on the corner of Rue Sainte-Catherine and Rue Panet. Over the course of the AIDS crisis, this lot became known as the Parc de l'espoir, evolving into an important feature of Québec's shared HIV/AIDS history, acquiring great symbolic, emotional and political meaning. By the time *Médecins de cœur* was released in 1993, the vacant lot had been adopted and used by ACT-UP Montréal since 1990 as a rallying point for HIV/AIDS activism and as a terminus for solidarity marches and protests. In commemoration of those who had died from HIV/AIDS, 1,400 ribbons (one ribbon marking each Quebecker who, at that point, had died from AIDS) were tied to the branches of the trees in the lot, building a striking, living memorial where members of the public could seek solace and remember loved ones (Metcalf, 2002). Montréal City Council objected to the activity and removed the

⁴⁴ On the 19th March 1989, gay PLWHA Joe Rose was beaten to death by a group of youths on a Montréal city bus. Eye-witness accounts suggest that Rose, accompanied by his partner, was subjected to homophobic and potentially serophobic comments before being attacked (Trudel, 1989). The shocking incident provoked much society-wide consternation and was widely publicised, raising significant questions about the city's attitudes towards the rights and protection of gay men and PLWHAs, as well as the broader issues of violent crime and street gangs.

ribbons, officially to safeguard the flora. Undeterred by the City's actions, the activists proceeded to re-garnish the trees with the same number of colourful decorations. The city bowed to the activists' pressure in 1996, when the lot was designated an official city park in memory of those who had died from HIV/AIDS. This sequence of events explains the spontaneously homely look of the park as seen in Rached's documentary. Elsewhere in the film, Rached filmed the activists erecting a fake Montréal city park sign on the lot, mocking the city's apparent indifference to the desire of local communities to officially sanction a site of remembrance. This ceremony took place on a stormy night in May 1993, on the eve of the first Wild and Wet party, a club event founded by BBCM, the profits from which went to HIV/AIDS causes.⁴⁵ In this sense, *Médecins de cœur* succeeds in documenting a key moment in the history of HIV/AIDS in Québec. The recording of the events of that night pinpoints the beginning of the journey towards the legitimisation of the AIDS crisis as a phenomenon worthy of public acknowledgement, as well as the birth of one of hugely influential charitable HIV/AIDS social events for which Montréal has become world-renowned.

However, throughout the documentary, Rached also uses the Parc de l'espoir as the source of a series of stylised refrains that play with the seasonal variations of the park to comment on the passage of time and the nature of human existence. Filming the park as it appears throughout Québec's four distinct seasons, the depictions pay particular attention to the ribbon-covered trees that stands in the lot on the corner of Sainte-Catherine and Panet. In summer, establishing and close-up shots depict the trees covered with fresh, green foliage, bathed in warm light and surrounded by the sound of bird song. In winter however, the same trees are seen bare and seemingly lifeless, with their black twigs and bark standing starkly in contrast to the snowdrifts by which they are surrounded. The ribbons remain steadfastly tied to the trees' branches; however, fluttering in the icy wind, they appear markedly forlorn. Additionally, in several park's depictions, Rached uses framing and panning shots to emphasise the presence of a bench positioned in front of the trees; in all instances, it is unoccupied. The vacant seating poignantly symbolises the spaces left behind by those who have died from AIDS as embodied by the ribbons fluttering in the

⁴⁵ For a detailed consideration of BBCM, see Chapter One, p.43.

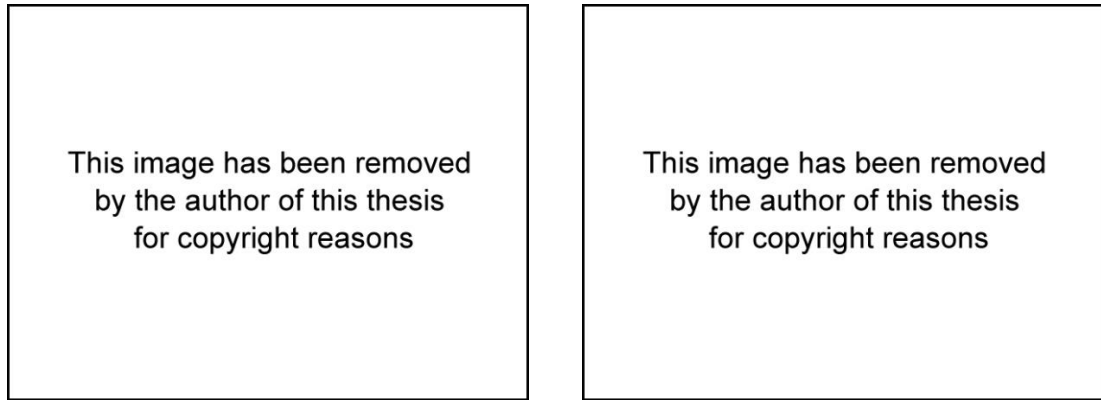


Illustration 2

background of the scene, whilst the changing of the trees through the seasons is a visual reminder of the cyclical nature of life that reflects both its fragility and its resilience (illustration 2). Though life (as represented by the passing of the seasons) may be filled with periods of darkness and death, it is also a force of good that is ultimately irrepressible. The documentary ends with the park in full summer bloom, completing the cycle. In the context of the AIDS crisis, the significance of such imagery is clear; the motif speaks directly to those who have experienced the loss and heartache of HIV, exhorting them to find strength and courage to overcome misery and darkness. By underscoring the undying nature of hope and new life, Rached uses the metaphorical value of the park to end *Médecins de cœur* on a note of cautious optimism.

The Parc de l'espoir also provides the background to a further set of interlaced motifs. In contrast to the naturalistic portrayal of the park and its significance as a site of remembrance for the victims of HIV/AIDS, and in parallel to the seasonal, shifting imagery of its trees, Rached uses music and the spoken word to create a second web of metaphors that echoes the doctors' calls for open discussion of the AIDS crisis. These motifs can be identified in the soundtrack of light-hearted jazz music that accompanies certain sequences. On top of this music, Rached superimposes the voice of an unnamed male who is one of Marchand's HIV-positive patients. Bit by bit, this patient narrates *Le Conteur*, a fable written by Henri Gougaud taken from his 1987 collection *L'Arbre aux trésors*, which tells the story of Yacoub, a man who recounts tales to passers-by every day without fail in Prague's Old Town Square. After years of telling stories and being ignored by all onlookers, Yacoub is approached by a young boy who

wonders why he is still there, seemingly wasting his life. In reply, Yacoub explains why, faced with the pressures of the world, his storytelling is crucial to the fostering of resilience.⁴⁶ The form, content and recurrence of the fable provoke a number of reflections upon the meaning and purpose of ritual in the context of the AIDS crisis. In the first instance, Yacoub's behaviour provides a comment upon the ritual of storytelling. The tale foregrounds storytelling as a means of remaining steadfast and finding strength in the face of uncertainty and thus resonates strongly with the broader context of the documentary, echoing the desire of doctors, and indeed PLWHAs, to be seen and heard by society. The synergy between the tale and the broad message of *Médecins de cœur* is strengthened by the division of the tale into a series of scenes. Just as Yacoub will keep telling stories, so the patient will repeatedly return throughout the documentary in order to tell the story of Yacoub, and so the doctors will continue to champion rational discussion and compassion as a means of facing HIV/AIDS. Yacoub, the patient and the doctors are united by an unrelenting desire to communicate, so that they may feel a sense of security and liberation. In turn, the ritual of storytelling is equated to the ritual of protest. The fable concretises the interpretation of *Médecins de cœur* as a positive testament to the importance of the spoken word as a means of responding to the AIDS crisis and of allowing the demands of marginalised peoples (and of those who speak for them) to be heard. It also demonstrates the emotional and mental relief that the ritual of storytelling can provide. *Médecins de cœur* is a documentary whose content is dense and hard-hitting. By providing a parallel account in poetic and symbolic form of the philosophy at play within the main body of the documentary, Yacoub's fable reveals how fictional stories can be used to understand and relate complex situations to wider audiences. As did Dufour, Rached uses formal motifs to afford the viewer windows of reflection in which they may better understand the documentary's complex content and underlying messages.

The content, focus and tone of *Médecins de cœur* suggest that Rached sought principally to address an audience that wanted to engage with HIV/AIDS on a scientific and philosophical level. Her documentary is centred on the clinician

⁴⁶ 'Je parle toujours, je parlerai jusqu'à ma mort. Autrefois, c'était pour changer le monde. Aujourd'hui, c'est pour que le monde, lui, ne me change pas.'

in possession of the facts; this emphasis upon doctors and their lengthy interrogation of HIV/AIDS as a clinical and ethical issue gives her discussion of the illness a distinctly measured and intellectual slant, rendering her documentary an important source of public information. However, the referential content of the film is itself enriched by the inclusion of emotive responses to the experience of AIDS, as well as by the film's more lyrical and figurative dimension. Rached's handling of the visual imagery of the changing seasons and of the metaphorical possibilities of storytelling and the fable bring a poetic and sensitive dimension to her documentary that cultivates a greater sense of intimacy with the viewer. The objective realities of the medical situation remain unchanged as the dominant focus of her film but, to a degree, are relieved and offset by her subjective comment as indirectly conveyed through her imaginative use of the visual and aural possibilities of her cinematic medium. Reflecting Grierson's principles of the documentary, *Médecins de cœur* blends realism with moments of impressionism to reveal the factual and emotional truths of the medical and human experience of HIV/AIDS. These moments allow Rached to reinforce the mood and take-home messages of the documentary, without overtly interfering with the words and actions of the protagonists.

***Quand l'amour est gai* (Laurent Gagliardi, 1994)**

The second NFB-produced documentary to reflect upon the AIDS crisis in Québec, a year after Rached's documentary, is Laurent Gagliardi's *Quand l'amour est gai*. Placing HIV/AIDS in another different light, this documentary is an exploration of the many different political, social and personal aspects of contemporary gay life and identity in Montréal. Gagliardi has had a long, successful and diverse career in Québec cinema as production assistant, scriptwriter and filmmaker. He has worked with influential Québec filmmakers including Léa Pool and Michel Langlois, and was the content director of the cinema and television branch of SODEC from 2007 to 2016.⁴⁷ In addition to *Quand l'amour est gai*, he is renowned for two other works, both of which, however, were produced outside of the auspices of the NFB. *La Nuit du visiteur*

⁴⁷ The Société de développement des entreprises culturelles (SODEC) is the highly influential and proactive branch of the Québec provincial government that seeks to promote and finance the production of diverse Québec cultural products.

(1990) is a theatrical drama shot in black-and-white that constitutes an abstract, almost voyeuristic study of the human form. His second work, *Claude Miller ou le jardin secret* (1992), can be read as a quasi-documentary homage to his filmmaking idol Claude Miller. In an interview featured in the publication *Échos Vedettes*, Gagliardi states that he is a gay man (Ménard, 1995). As compared with Rached, he can therefore be considered a filmmaker closer to the epicentre of the AIDS crisis in Québec in terms of the demographics that HIV principally touched.

Quand l'amour est gai consists of a series of interviews with a wide range of gay men, in which they are each invited to define their sexual identities and practices and to consider, nuance and critique common societal (mis)conceptions associated with homosexuality. Gagliardi's documentary shares certain similarities with *Médecins de cœur*. Like Rached, Gagliardi creates an ethnographic study of a discrete social group and structures his film as a series of interwoven, non-linear vignettes. However, the focuses of the two documentaries are rather different. Rached's film principally sought to question and disprove misconceptions relating to HIV/AIDS via the measured, fact-based responses of the medical profession. This is reflected in the synopsis of the film, as provided by the NFB:

Documentaire sur le sida. Un essai profondément humain qui donne un autre point de vue : celui d'omnipraticiens, de chercheurs, de spécialistes en éthique, de philosophes et d'humanistes. La maladie y est omniprésente mais ne domine pas les propos. Elle sert de révélateur sur l'état de notre société. Une approche globale, inédite, qui va bien au-delà de la vie, bien au-delà de la mort, bien au-delà du sida. (National Film Board of Canada, [no date] a)

In contrast, Gagliardi's documentary is described by the NFB as an effort to demystify some of the stereotypes associated with gay men, through the more subjective locus of gay men and their feelings:

Documentaire sur des hommes qui rompent le silence sur leur homosexualité. Ils parlent de leur difficulté à s'accepter et à faire

accepter leur différence; de la place qu'occupe la sensualité dans leur vie; de leur volonté farouche d'aimer librement. Un film qui, en célébrant l'amour d'un jeune couple, se propose de briser l'image parfois négative qui entoure le monde gai. (National Film Board of Canada, [no date] b)

The absence here of any mention of HIV/AIDS might seem to place in doubt the relevance of *Quand l'amour est gai* to a discussion of the AIDS crisis in Québec. However, such a conclusion would ignore the strong influence that HIV exerted upon the societal positions and perceptions of gay men during the 1980s and 1990s. Chapter One demonstrated the connection made both epidemiologically and culturally between gay men and the emergence of HIV; it also underscored how this connection was foregrounded by prominent media outlets in such a way as to propagate and exacerbate negative stereotypes of gay men founded upon promiscuity, selfishness and irresponsibility, and to imply their status as scapegoats complicit in the spread of AIDS. *Quand l'amour est gai* can thus be interpreted as an attempt to confront the AIDS crisis by revealing the actual thoughts and feelings of those belonging to the demographic most adversely caught up in the event. Ultimately, Gagliardi's documentary blends objective and subjective approaches to clarify the complex relationship between gay men and the AIDS crisis. The characteristics of the men interviewed interrogate the factual misconceptions around their situation, whilst the stories they recount and the feelings they express reveal some of the emotional experiences of gay men at a time of great suffering and uncertainty.

Identifying the 'fast-lane gay'

In order to gain a full understanding of how the interviewees of *Quand l'amour est gai* seek to set the record straight and debunk certain misconceptions of homosexuality that were exaggerated by the AIDS crisis, it is necessary to establish some key characteristics of these misconstructions. Throughout *And the Band Played On*, Randy Shilts constructs an impression of the 'fast-lane gay', a gay male figure he describes as central to the spread of HIV across North America and to the creation of predominant ideas of the AIDS crisis. Part-fact and

part-fiction, the figure represents the ‘type’ of homosexual most likely to be popularly associated with HIV, an association perpetuated by both the epidemiological facts of the situation and by voices within popular culture and the media. The ‘fast-lane gay’ would typically be young, handsome and muscular, virile, highly sexually active and adventurous, emotionally detached and involved in the party scene and recreational drugs.⁴⁸ Shilts describes how this figure emerged out of the sexual revolution and the influential North American disco scene of the 1970s and early 1980s, a period that witnessed the rise in the number and popularity of gay nightclubs and bathhouses in many North American metropolises. The heavy commoditising of sex that these latter sites quickly and noticeably achieved allowed existing conceptions of gay men to be rendered more extreme.⁴⁹ The validity of Shilts’s figure can, of course, be questioned. Canadian sociologist Barry D. Adam (1993: 176-77) challenges the validity and accuracy of such a figure, dubbed by him a ‘superconsumer of ‘fast food’ sex’ belonging to ‘a culture of orgasm’, arguing that the stereotype corresponded only to small sub-groups of gay communities in large cities. Shilts’s stereotypical figure has also been critiqued as a manifestation of his own internalised homophobia (Crimp, 1988: 242-44). In spite of its inaccuracies, the stereotype of the ‘fast-lane gay’ was propagated and hardened by conservatives, whose desires to pathologise homosexuality belie their paranoid fears of abnormality and perversion (Hocquenghem, 2000: 39-40). The interpretation of this figure by conservatives as representative of all gay men, allowing for their portrayal as both homogenous and ‘other’, and therefore singularly abnormal, organised and dangerous, shares echoes with Foucault’s conception of ‘the homosexual’.⁵⁰ This justified the ignoring of AIDS as a health concern and the demonising of all those who fell ill, portraying them, regardless of their actual characteristics and pastimes, as deviant hedonists whose health had simply buckled under the pressures of their debauched lifestyles (Patton, 1985: 6). Though Shilts develops

⁴⁸ ‘Finally, they [the party crowd] were caring about something other than the “four D’s” of drugs, dick, disco and dish’ (Shilts, 2007: 139).

⁴⁹ ‘Anyone who has ever spent one night in a gay bathhouse knows that it is (or was) one of the most ruthlessly ranked, hierarchized, and competitive environments imaginable. Your looks, muscles, hair distribution, size of cock, and shape of ass determined exactly how happy you were going to be during those few hours, and rejection, generally accompanied by two or three words at most, could be swift and brutal, with none of the civilizing hypocrisies with which we get rid of undesirables in the outside world’ (Bersani, 1988: 206).

⁵⁰ See Chapter One, p.11.

his argument in the context of the US, the relevance of the 'fast-lane gay' to the gay scene of Montréal can be readily seen. Many elements of this figure were present throughout the Québec press's coverage of the AIDS crisis. The city has, in any case, been internationally well-known throughout the latter half of the twentieth century for its high number of gay night clubs, saunas and strip clubs, and before this as an Americanised island of pleasure-seeking licence in a strongly Catholic-controlled, parochial province.

Questioning gay male physicality

In an interview with *Fugues*, Gagliardi made clear his desire to produce a documentary that would specifically shed light upon the real-life diversity of the gay population and thus question homogenous stereotypes associated with homosexuality:

Je suis passé à travers un long travail de recherche. Je ne voulais pas de personnalité connue, pas de visages qu'on voit à la télévision trop souvent, mais des gens *ordinaires*. (Lafontaine, 1994b, italics in original)

The ordinariness of Gagliardi's interlocutors was noted (and appreciated) by film critics in the gay press:

Le cinéaste, Laurent Gagliardi privilégie plutôt une approche intimiste. Pour une fois, on nous montre des gais *ordinaires*, intelligents et articulés, jamais ridicules, la plupart du temps très justes, parfois même émouvants. (Lafontaine, 1994a, italics in original)

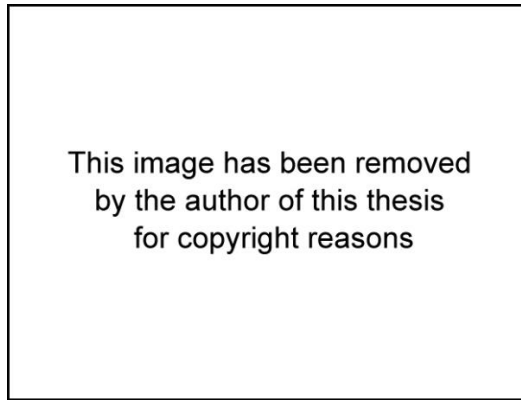
This reaction suggests a collective desire among Montréal's gay population to re-humanise and diversify predominant perceptions of gay men and to be perceived by the wider public in a more pluralistic, representative and positive light. Indeed, the popularity of Gagliardi's film amongst gay men would also suggest that his target audience appreciated his film's exploration of contemporary gay identities. In March 1998, *Fugues* conducted a wide-ranging reader survey to build a picture

of contemporary gay life in Québec; under the Culture section of the survey, *Quand l'amour est gai* ranked as the sixth most-watched LGBT film by all survey participants, the highest ranking documentary of the 26 films listed (Lafontaine, 1998).⁵¹ An analysis of both the personal characteristics and the remarks of the key protagonists of *Quand l'amour est gai* demonstrates how they succeed in challenging the key facets of Shilts's stereotypical figure of the 'fast-lane gay' and how they thereby provide a different, alternative context for consideration of the AIDS crisis. It must be noted that, in the main body of the film, none of the fifteen interviewees are ever named.⁵² The lack of names can be read as an attempt to elevate the status of the protagonists from that of individuals to that of spokespersons who provide a cross-section of personalities and lifestyles across their entire group, whilst simultaneously representing the shared opinions of all within the gay population.

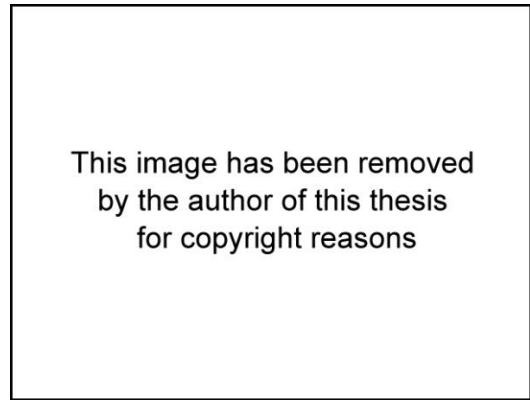
Based solely on their appearance, the men featured in *Quand l'amour est gai* contradict predominant conceptions of gay male physicality that were propagated by unrepresentative coverage of the AIDS crisis. The huge variety of ages and physiques challenges the homogeneity of the youthful and muscular figure of the 'fast-lane gay'. Raymond features prominently throughout the documentary. He is depicted mostly at a hospital in the company of a patient whom the viewer can presume to be his partner and with whom he is shown sharing a kiss; the moment is touching and respectful and celebrates the tender affection of the partners. Both men appear to be over sixty years of age; their presence in a film about homosexuality could therefore be surprising to some viewers. Liberal Western manifestations of homosexuality in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries can be critiqued as being overly youth-oriented. The dominant images of homosexuality produced by the gay community itself prize the ideal of youth and often shun the natural process of ageing. According to the research I carried out at the Archives gaies du Québec, images of male beauty found across Québec's gay publications principally featured those below

⁵¹ The fifth to first most-seen LGBT films as reported by the *Fugues* survey are as follows: *Les Nuits fauves* (Cyril Collard, 1992), *Anne Trister* (Léa Pool, 1986), *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), *Being at Home with Claude* (Jean Beaudin, 1992) and *La Cage aux folles* (Édouard Molinaro, 1978).

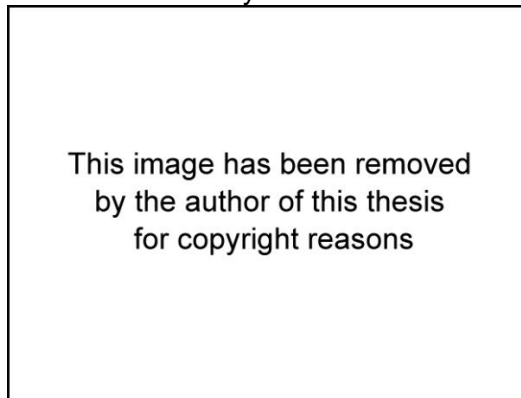
⁵² The protagonists are only named in the end credits by order of appearance. For the sake of the clarity of this analysis, I have named the principal protagonists (see illustration 3.)



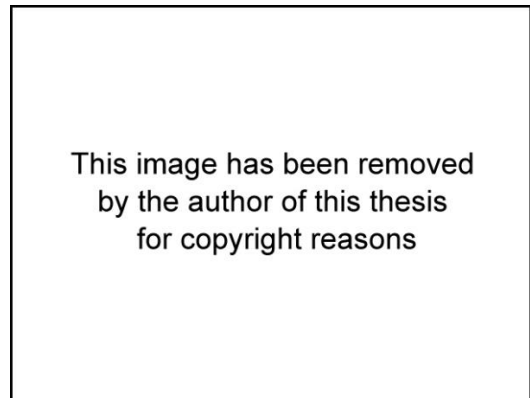
Raymond



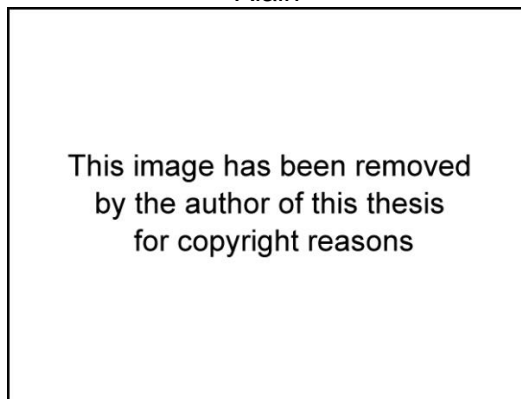
René



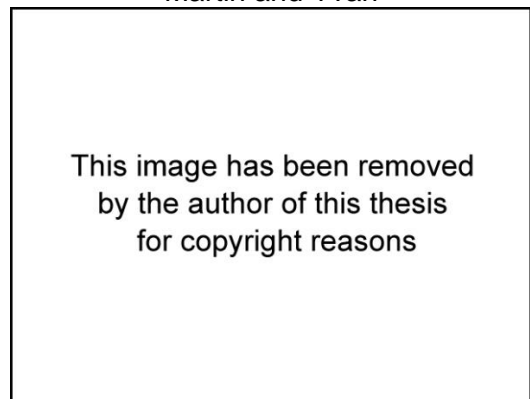
Alain



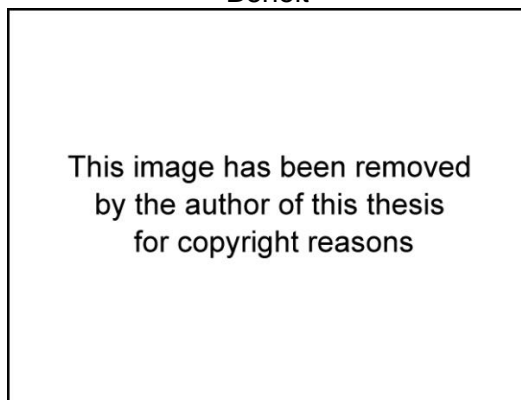
Martin and Yvan



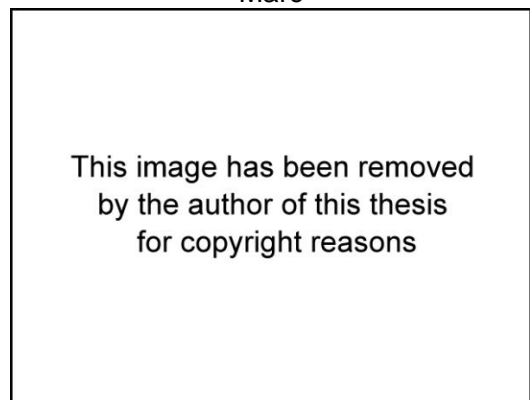
Benoit



Marc



Ghislain



Jean-Guy

Illustration 3

the age of forty, thus mirroring the tendency of influential media voices to ignore the existence of older gay men.

The framing of Raymond is typical of that of the interviewees in Gagliardi's documentary. He is predominantly filmed in a shallow focus, close-up shot that emphasises both his physical presence and his speech. The camera's proximity is particularly adept in amplifying the emotional impact of his tales of his experiences as a young gay man at a time when homosexuality was a far greater taboo subject than in the 1990s. He recounts, in particular, the story of his first meeting with his partner, with an obvious pleasure in reliving his memories that renders the sequence moving.⁵³ The sequence is the first of many in which Gagliardi captures his interviewees' feelings concerning their sexuality through personal anecdotes. The use of this particular narrative device, one that is associated with the qualities of conviviality and spontaneity, consistently renders the depictions of the various protagonists both personable and believable.

In addition to challenging youthful conceptions of gay men, *Quand l'amour est gai* also questions the homogeneity of the imagery surrounding gay male corporeality. Intent on the maintenance and preening of his muscular body beautiful, Shilts's 'fast-lane gay' constantly strives for an unattainable form of physical perfection. The men of Gagliardi's film, however, demonstrate a range of different body types and attire. Some of the men's outward appearances are so far removed from dominant stereotypes of gay men that, at first glance, one may be surprised by their claimed sexuality. Alain, another prominent interviewee, is a primary school teacher who, amongst other things, makes the point that he has children and was once married. He is of a larger stature, wears glasses and baggy clothing and has thinning hair. However, the ease with which he discusses gay desire suggests that he is perfectly comfortable with his sexuality. He demonstrates moreover that the cut-and-dried stereotypes associated with gay culture cannot be taken as representative of the diverse realities of homosexuality that they amalgamate and reduce, and that the border between heterosexuality and homosexuality is in any case porous and uncertain.

⁵³ 'On avait été au cinéma, ensemble, et puis... on avait joué de genoux! Et puis mes émotions étaient très, très fortes, je tremblais! J'avais le cœur qui était pour me sortir de la poitrine. Et puis, il m'a invité chez lui, et ça a été une expérience absolument bouleversante.'

Questioning gay male personality

The ‘fast-lane gay’, according to Shilts’s analysis, is also popularly deemed responsible for his own seropositivity and carelessly culpable in the spread of HIV. The continued spread of the virus amongst MSM populations across North America was indeed often interpreted as a sign of homosexual obsession with escapism, selfish promiscuity and a concomitant lack of concern for the health of sexual partners. This conception of gay men as being reckless, uncaring and self-centred is refuted by *Quand l’amour est gai* in a number of different ways. Gagliardi captures in particular the different forms of community that his interviewees have formed. The documentary features two gay couples, Raymond and his partner, and Martin and Yvan. Both pairs demonstrate that gay men are more than capable of forming and maintaining loving and stable relationships. In the documentary’s only explicit embodiment of HIV/AIDS, Martin and Yvan further reveal that they are a serodiscordant couple. In terms of their personal experience of the illness, Yvan speaks of how Martin initially hid his HIV-positive diagnosis. He recalls feelings of disappointment at Martin’s secrecy, but states positively that the love shared between them is stronger than any of the challenges that his status may pose. The way in which Martin’s status is disclosed is very similar to the disclosure of Réjean Thomas in *Médecins de cœur*. The moment arrives unannounced and is relatively brief. The issue, expressed in an uncomplicated vernacular, is confronted efficiently and positively.⁵⁴ Both disclosures maintain the dignity of the PLWHAs in question, and demonstrate how their lives are not necessarily dictated by their status. The couple’s experience with the virus demonstrates the possibility of approaching HIV in a rational and productive manner and the stable and loving relationships in which PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs may find themselves.

Gagliardi’s film also demonstrates the abilities of gay men to form platonic, caring communities. Benoit is young, fresh-faced, handsome and trendy. One might therefore initially presume him to belong to the party scene and its associated revelry. However, in spite of his physical characteristics, Benoit

⁵⁴ ‘J’ai dit à Martin, j’ai dit “pourquoi tu me l’as pas dit?” [...] j’ai dit, “est-ce que c’est vrai?” et je me souviens, t’es venu, les yeux pleins d’eau, tsé, pis moi ce que j’ai dit, j’ai regardé, [j’ai dit] “peu importe ta santé, moi j’vais être là. Ça change absolument rien, moi chuis ton chum, je t’aime ben gros, pis ça va être comme ça, là, *ad vitam æternam*.”’

emerges as a responsible individual who is socially engaged with those around him and who is filmed working in the Centre communautaire des gais et lesbiennes de Montréal (CCGLM). The Centre established itself in the heart of the Village in 1988, and constitutes one of the many 'institutions' of queer Montréal depicted by Gagliardi. The centre promotes the improvement of LGBT lives through information, research and education. It also serves as a venue for community meetings and events, and hosts the Bibliothèque à livres ouverts, one of Canada's largest LGBT libraries. Against this backdrop of positive, community-based information sharing, Benoit shares an anecdote with the camera, discussing the difficulty he experienced in identifying with dominant homosexual imagery as both a child and an adult.⁵⁵ His words directly evoke the negative imagery associated with Shilts's figure of the 'fast-lane gay', demonstrating the potential irrelevance of this polemical figure to reality and particularly to gay men's conceptions of themselves. As he speaks, the camera slowly zooms in on him working at a computer in an office at the CCGLM. The juxtaposition between the negative tone of Benoit's voiceover and the positive connotations of his activities at the CCGLM subtly suggests that he himself embodies the positive image of homosexuality with which he longed to identify. Gagliardi's depiction of gay Montréalers suggests the solidarity of the gay community during the AIDS crisis and demonstrates the existence of an elective kinship that does not revolve solely around sexual encounters.

Gagliardi also depicts the desires of gay men to reach out and interact with wider, non-LGBT society. One sequence in particular depicts René, a rugged, gay ex-police officer, speaking at a high school on behalf of a charity that seeks to question and tackle homophobia among Québec's youth. In talking honestly and candidly about the difficulties that he experienced coming to terms with his sexuality, he obliges the student audience to reflect upon their attitudes towards gays and their stereotypes, opening the way for greater acceptance of homosexuality amongst young Quebeckers at a grassroots level. The positive

⁵⁵ 'Les seules images que j'avais de l'homosexualité, c'étaient très négatives, c'étaient des gens super efféminés, c'étaient des rencontres d'un soir, la drogue, l'alcool... pis des comportements dans lesquels je me reconnais pas du tout. Il n'y a aucune image positive de l'homosexualité que j'ai vue quand j'étais jeune. J'étais obligé de pratiquement dévaliser les bibliothèques municipales de mon quartier pour réussir à trouver un semblant d'image positive, mais ça finissait toujours mal, soit par un suicide, soit par quelque chose de tragique, ce qui te donne pas nécessairement le goût de vouloir entrer là-dedans.'

and productive interactions between René and the students is underscored by Gagliardi's use of tracking shots. The first tracking shot, filmed from a position behind René, depicts him speaking to the auditorium in front of him. The second tracking shot constitutes a reversal of the first shot, with the camera positioned at the back of the auditorium behind the students, looking down towards René at the front of the room. Both shots emphasise the full attention being paid by all of the students to him as he reflects on the contemporary acceptance (or lack thereof) of homosexuality in Québec. The camera's capturing of the room and the scene renders him a sort of prophetic sage, who commands respect and enlightens the youth of Québec by promoting acceptance. The conversations that unfold between René and the students are measured and productive, and demonstrate the social intimacy that gay men are capable of forming with other societal groups.

Questioning gay male sexuality

The protagonists of *Quand l'amour est gai* successfully interrogate and disprove negative stereotypes surrounding the physicality and social lives of gay men and PLWHAs during the AIDS crisis by demonstrating both their diversity and relative conventionality. It is clear from the very outset of the documentary that Gagliardi, a gay man himself, sought to consider homosexuality from a perspective that places emotions, sensuality and intimacy explicitly at the forefront of the dialogue and action. The title of the film positions homosexuality in the context of love and romance, one in which, it suggests, gay men are rarely considered. This interpretation is supported by the thoughts of several of the film's interviewees who express their frustration at the stereotyping that defines gay men exclusively in terms of casual and detached promiscuity and a supposed inability to love. Gagliardi's protagonists, who systematically interrogate and counteract every quality of Shilts's stereotypical 'fast-lane gay', arguably reflect the increasing trend towards normalisation as championed by certain parts of the LGBT population. This movement, one that gained traction in the 1990s, saw gays seek to be recognised as more than abnormal, oversexualised individuals and treated as similar to non-LGBT people rather than 'others', and was crystallised by assimilationist demands for equal marriage and adoption rights (Richardson,

2004: 392-93). However, this is not to suggest that *Quand l'amour est gai* denies the questions of explicit sexuality that lie at the heart of gay identity; it is in its reflections upon homo-sensuality that Gagliardi's film stands out as a daring and revelatory piece of cinema. In addition to investigating the more tender side of gay intimacy and sex, *Quand l'amour est gai* also explores its more recreational aspects. In his treatment of his protagonists, however, Gagliardi never seeks to deny the nature of the men's sex lives, nor to cast moral judgement on their views of sex and intimacy. What *Quand l'amour est gai* achieves is both a nuancing of the stereotypes surrounding the sexuality of gay men and a celebration of the diversity of homo-sensuality.⁵⁶

The raunchier side of homosexuality is explored through Marc and Ghislain. It is via these two protagonists that the audience is able to embark on a journey of exploration and explanation of one particularly shrouded site of gay male sexuality. Shilts extensively documents the role played by bathhouses in both the commercialisation of gay sex and the spread of HIV amongst gay men across North America. Whilst his investigation purports to be an objective piece of journalism, Shilts's descriptions of bathhouses often tend towards a moralising stance and belie his disapproval of the venues, ones whose possibilities of orgiastic fantasy permitted the unprotected, multiple-partner sex that contributed to the infection of gay men. In contrast, there existed opposing gay voices who, whilst not condoning the spread of HIV through the kind of sex occurring in bathhouses, insisted that the unity and force of gay communities worldwide during the AIDS crisis lay in their rejection of monogamy imposed by heteronormative society and in the continuing practice and celebration of gay sex.⁵⁷ It is therefore appropriate that Gagliardi's documentary should feature two prominent dramatisations of a gay sauna, a contentious site of sexual recreation that held different and complex symbolic values to different gay men. In the first dramatisation, Marc is heard explaining how he believes that the emulation of

⁵⁶ Perhaps surprisingly, Gagliardi's documentary was also shown on Québec television, with Télévision Quatre-Saisons transmitting his frank contemplation of modern homosexuality into living rooms across the province, a daring move that was remarked upon by the Québec press: 'Nul doute qu'après la diffusion de *Quand l'amour est gai* le vendredi 21 avril à 21 heures, ça va jaser dans bien des salons' (Ménard, 1995).

⁵⁷ 'It is obvious that gay culture has enabled us to enjoy sex, and not feel guilty about it, and not always to equate love with lifelong sexual fidelity to one person. This has been the strength of our culture, not its weakness' (Watney, 1987: 127).

extreme conceptions of heterosexual virility by certain gay men is motivated by a fear of being labelled by society as effeminate, passive and penetrable. As Marc enunciates his thoughts, a tracking camera pans across the locker room of a sauna. A naked man enters the room and proceeds to dry himself in a leisurely way towards the rear of the space. A second man enters, gradually undresses to a state of nudity and then leaves down a corridor lit with blue light. The theatrical down-lighting exaggerates the contours of the impressive physiques of both men and casts shadows across their faces, abstracting them as anonymous, masculine, muscular bodies and thus illustrating the pertinence of Marc's analysis. The scene seeks not to morally judge the sauna scene or those performing within it, but to explain why gay culture idolises hyper-masculinity to the extent that it does, and the influence of societal judgement over the lives and behaviours of gay men.

The second sequence features Ghislain, a bespectacled artist who appears to be in his mid-30s. He is a lean, handsome and unshaven man who speaks with a husky voice. His outward appearance suggests a certain degree of virility and his interview reinforces this initial impression. Ghislain speaks at length in his studio of his love for the male form. However, his role as an artist explains (to some extent) his treatment and appreciation of the male body as an object of beauty. Ghislain is heard explaining the appeal of the sauna, describing the establishment as a sexual paradise in which the freedom and quantity of choice of men on offer is both convenient and irresistible.⁵⁸ As he enunciates his opinions, the camera captures scenes from the real-life Sauna Oasis in the gay Village. In the first instance, a fixed camera is positioned looking down a corridor, off of which lie a series of individual rooms. A number of men in towels pass in and out of these doors, moving through the space to a soundtrack of slow classical piano music, that transforms their movements into an elegant dance with overtones of grandeur. The men thus demonstrate the performative and even comical nature of the act of seduction that defines the purpose of the establishment. The camera then offers a less stylised, more representative

⁵⁸ 'Le sauna, c'est la multitude. La multitude des partenaires, la multitude... c'est orgiaque [...] dans le sens du désir, la séduction... de voir des corps presque nus, de les voir dans les douches, de les voir dans les bains, dans la chambre. Moi je trouve ça très beau. Si t'as besoin de rencontrer quelqu'un dans un sauna, c'est très rapide. T'as besoin de toucher un corps. Tu ne perds pas de temps, okay ?'

depiction; the music stops, and the viewer is afforded a highly subjective, first-person shot that walks through the maze of corridors and rooms, investigating the contents of each cubicle from the perspective of the *dragueur*. A variety of men are found in different states of undress, position and apparent arousal. As was the case in the locker room, down-lighting obscures the faces and exaggerates the men's body shapes.

The sauna sequences succeed in nuancing negative preconceptions surrounding saunas and the activities that they permit. Gagliardi's camera is honest yet sympathetic, depicting the sauna both frankly and artistically, translating the emotions of the moment by subtly manipulating technique and *mise-en-scène*. Through candidly exploring the activities, emotions and moods of the sauna, the sequence takes on an informative role that demystifies the institution and its *raison d'être*. Ghislain's voiceover does not seek to convince the viewer of the 'respectability' of saunas, but to reveal the logic behind the motivations for the frequenting of such places. The use of first-person perspectives places the viewer in the eyes and mind of the pleasure seeker, producing an unashamed exploration of homo-sensuality, regardless of its location and form.

Ghislain's interest in the male form is further exaggerated by Gagliardi in one particular scene. This sequence opens with him discussing his admiration for the iconic and hyper masculine artwork of Touko Laaksonen. Laaksonen, better known by his pseudonym Tom of Finland, was a Finnish artist renowned for his erotic and pornographic depictions of masculinity and homosexuality. His black-and-white illustrations of leather-clad policemen, muscular construction workers and brawny bikers have become an integral part of international gay iconography. This discussion takes place in the sex shop Priape, another institution of queer Montréal. Opening in 1974 on Boulevard de Maisonneuve, Priape was one of the first stores in both Québec and Canada to cater towards the sex lives of gay men, contributing to the sexual liberation of gay Montréalers. The naming of the store after the Greek god of fertility Priapus suggests a positive, fruitful place in which sexuality may be fully explored. As part of the broad push to create the gay Village focussed to the East of Montréal's downtown area during the 1980s, the store moved to its current premises on Rue Sainte-Catherine in 1987. Its featuring in Gagliardi's documentary as a site of gay male sexuality reflects the diversity of

the activities offered to gay men in the Village and sheds positive light upon an institution veiled in secrecy. Ghislain's location and material-at-hand further demonstrate the intertextuality of *Quand l'amour est gai*, a documentary that is capable of symbolically reaching outside of its confines as a discrete piece of cinema to a local and global homosexual context that would have been instantly recognisable to the film's target audience.

The motif: the loving couple

In a similar fashion to both Dufour and Rached, Gagliardi punctuates the main body of his documentary with a series of evenly spaced, highly expressive and deliberately crafted scenes. However, whilst structurally similar to those featured in *Mortel désir* and *Médecins de cœur*, the content and form of Gagliardi's scenes convey an entirely different message. The scenes featured in *Quand l'amour est gai* are variations on the theme of homo-sensuality that depict a male couple engaging in a variety of sexual and sensual activities. In content, and also in form, these scenes clearly reflect Gagliardi's wish to demonstrate the potential tenderness of gay desire. Both men are relatively young, of average height and build and, in contrast to the exaggerated bodies of the Tom of Finland illustrations, have attractive but unexceptional, 'normal' physiques. Their characteristics therefore do not comply with the exaggerated physicality associated with the stereotype of the 'fast-lane gay'. Both men are naked; in some instances they guard their modesty with towels, in others they do not. This would suggest that the men are happy to embrace both their own and each other's nudity.

In the first instance, the couple are depicted lying together on a bed, caressing each other's bodies and kissing. Their movements are slow and gentle, and their embrace suggests care and affection. The slow panning of the camera along their entwined bodies from their feet to their heads emphasises the perfect synergy evident between the two men. The qualities of the room in which they lie echo the intimacy and emotions of the moment. The lighting is soft and warm, giving the men's skin a warm glow. The bed, positioned in the centre of the room, is covered in white sheets. Through a set of French doors, light floods through sheer white curtains. The setting is theatrical, yet retains a sense of profound

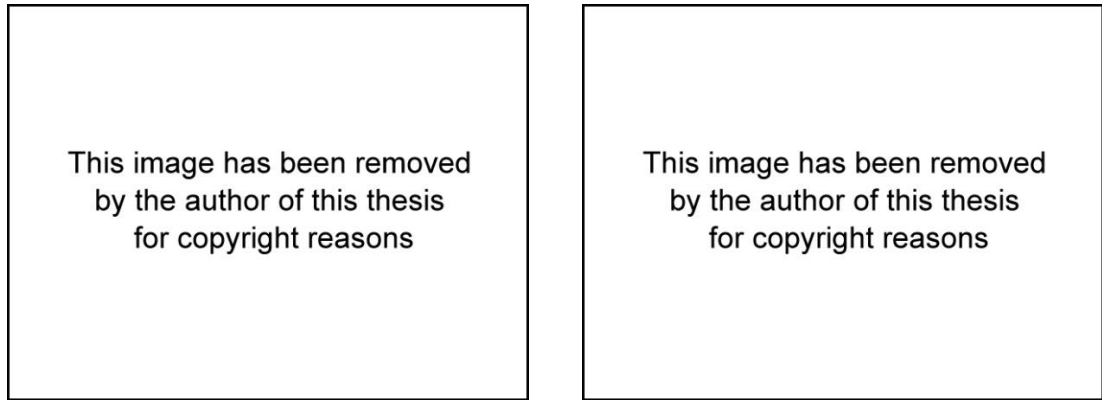


Illustration 4

intimacy. This perception is reinforced by the soundtrack of a solitary piano playing Franz Schubert's romantic and longing Piano *Sonata in A Major*. This is a space that allows the men to perform their acts of intimacy in a manner that elevates the impact and primacy of their shared emotions and movements.

The three other variations share the same visual and aural characteristics. In the second, the men are filmed standing by the French doors, one caressing and embracing the other from behind. In the third instance, the pair return to their bed where they are captured appearing to give each other oral sex. While the scene is most definitely *osé*, it is not strictly pornographic: that is, its aim (and effect) is not the arousal of the spectator, but rather the depiction of a sensuality inseparable from reciprocal affection. The sexual act is carried out (or simulated) by the men in a way that remains tender, loving and respectful. The final scene shows the two men lying on the bed, side-by-side on their backs. They are naked, completely exposing their bodies for the first time. In contrast to their other appearances, they lie hand-in-hand and completely still. The camera is positioned over them, gradually zooming out and retreating into the space above.

The four variations can be read as the abstracted and stylised movements of a sexual encounter. The first two scenes hint at an increasing foreplay, with the third signifying the crescendo of the act and the fourth symbolising the post-coital period (illustration 4). The two men thus enact the same sequence of events as depicted or suggested to take place in bathhouse. Though the sequences depict a highly private moment, the careful staging and choreography render the depictions of gay sex artistic rather than voyeuristic. The scenes celebrate the unity that can emerge between gay men who act upon their shared desire for

intimacy and thus act as a provocative and empowering metaphor for the documentary's central plea for honesty and bravery in the negotiation of contemporary gay male sexuality. The emergence of HIV amongst gay men exaggerated the association between homosexuals and penetrative, anal sex. The four interpolated scenes counteract perceptions of homosexuality as hedonistic, dehumanised consumption based on a crude and simplistic active/passive, penetrative/receptive dynamic by demonstrating instead the diversity of erotic acts in which gay men can partake as equals who respect and care for each other.

Gagliardi's extensive questioning of gay stereotypes and treatment of HIV/AIDS as an issue relating to identity, sex and intimacy results in a documentary that validates and strengthens the positive sense of self and communal strength of the gay community during a period in which it had endured great pain, suffering and loss at the hands of HIV/AIDS. It functions primarily as a means of promoting solidarity amongst a demographic adversely affected by the AIDS crisis, but also looks to explain some of the dynamics at play within key ideas of gay community and sexuality. Mirroring Grierson's principles, Gagliardi contrasts more objective treatments of his protagonists with more subjective dramatisations to create a study of contemporary gay experiences that effectively reveals the intangible essence of desire and intimacy that lie at their heart. His protagonists principally approach HIV obliquely through the consideration of current conceptions of gay identity, sexuality and sensuality over which the AIDS crisis exerted great influence. The subtlety of this approach means that *Quand l'amour est gai* never equates 'being gay' to 'having AIDS', as often did mainstream responses to HIV/AIDS enacted by non-PLWHAs (Patton, 1990: 111). Moreover, it counteracts this harmful process of elision and erasure by successfully investigating the nuanced relationship between HIV and homosexuality, without conflating the two intertwined (yet different, and not necessarily conjoined) issues.

The three filmmakers studied in this chapter have each used the flexibility of the documentary format to examine HIV/AIDS as it was experienced in Québec in new and revelatory lights that get to the heart of the host of social, political and personal questions it engendered. All three documentaries are similar in their

successful rejection of problematic religious, scientific and discursive responses to HIV/AIDS and in their adoption of measured and frank discussion of the issues and emotions associated with the virus and logical deconstruction of some of the many stereotypes associated with it. They also embody some of the particular characteristics of the genre of the documentary as developed in Canada and most especially in Québec. Echoing the founding principles of the NFB, they broadly seek to foster different senses of unity in the face of crisis and to provide anthropological studies of HIV/AIDS that cast the crisis as a human phenomenon. Echoing the shift in interest towards a more pluralistic view of society, the three films are also noticeably sympathetic in their treatments of the marginalised demographics caught up in the AIDS crisis and endeavour to identify and dissect in a non-judgemental manner key issues of identity and wellbeing relative to such groups, particularly those concerning gay men. All three documentaries broadly focus upon and examine the AIDS crisis as it was experienced in Montréal, attesting to the city's status as Québec's epicentre for HIV, in terms of sheer cases, as well as AIDS-related trauma, grieving and cultural and political action. In spite of these similarities, the three films remain remarkably distinct in their approach to their subject matter. *Mortel désir* presents HIV/AIDS as an emotional matter of universal relevance. This stands in contrast to *Médecins de cœur*, which presents the AIDS crisis as a clinical concern, as well as to *Quand l'amour est gai*, which principally posits the crisis as a question of sexuality and identity. These emphases reflect the distinct and differing audiences for whom the documentaries were produced. Dufour's film, intent on revealing the ubiquity of the disease, seeks to reach out to as broad a public as possible; Rached's more educational documentary addresses a more intellectually-engaged set of viewers and Gagliardi's provocative piece speaks principally to a gay audience.

In matters of technique, the three documentaries display a number of shared characteristics, deriving from and also exceeding the principles of *Cinéma direct*, but reflecting the more nuanced ideas of the Griersonian approach. As illustrated by the treatment of Michel in *Mortel désir*, of Marchand in *Médecins de cœur* and Raymond in *Quand l'amour est gai*, the three films make extensive use of the talking heads format, entailing mid to close-up shots of the protagonists giving testimony (a mode of communication to be further studied in Chapter Three), synchronous sound and naturalistic lighting and staging. This approach,

one that prioritises the protagonists' remarks and amplifies the impact of the spoken word as an invaluable source of insight, permits protagonists to appeal as directly as possible to viewers, beckoning them to create moments of intimacy and exchange. However, across the three films, the filming of protagonists, interviews and events appears mostly staged and relatively unspontaneous; the predominant use of the talking heads format indicates that the interviewees consented to being filmed and were thus prepared to speak on camera and were not approached haphazardly in the true spirit of *Cinéma direct*. Nevertheless, exceptions to this include the school board debate and Amsterdam AIDS conference sequences featured in *Médecins de cœur* which spontaneously record events as they unfolded. In further contrast with the tenets of the movement, none of the three documentaries rely on rituals as their principal content and focus, suggesting that such an approach may be inappropriate or uncondusive to the questioning and documentation of the AIDS crisis and its unique specificities as a generalised medical, cultural and human phenomenon.

Further reflecting Grierson's ideas, the three documentaries use highly stylised and subjectively shot and edited material to offset their use of talking heads and emphasise the essence of the prevailing messages orally conveyed by their protagonists through a variety of metaphorically-charged visual and aural effects. In *Mortel désir*, the scenes based around the dancing couple symbolise the openness to emotional communication essential to a better understanding of the diverse implications of the AIDS crisis. The artistic and expressive qualities of the scenes have an energising effect on the protagonists' testimonies, with the pressing, rhythmic soundtrack of the dance hinting at the universally relevant questions of physicality and desire that lie at the heart of the protagonists' words. In *Médecins de cœur*, the scenes based around the Parc de l'espoir connect a factual, medical documentary to a wider philosophical reflection on the universal human realities of life and death. With the majority of the filming in indoor locations, the park scenes have a refreshing effect on the main body of the documentary, providing a much needed splash of vibrancy as well as literal and metaphorical breathing space. The park also allows Rached to successfully exploit the symbolic properties of nature to echo the film's message of optimism, a reading strengthened by the cheerful soundtrack and lyrical narrative of these scenes. In *Quand l'amour est gai*, the sequences based around the loving couple

form an idealizing insistence on gay love that is the antithesis of death and sorrow. The striking visuals of the interpolated scenes afford the documentary a daring and empowering sense of erotic intrigue that appeals directly to the desires of the film's target audience. In contrast to the outdoor location used by Rached, the indoor location chosen by Gagliardi for his dramatic scenes of intimacy symbolises the need to reconsider and re-humanise ideas of homosexuality and to acknowledge the complexity, beauty, tenderness and potential fragility of gay desire and love. Chapter One outlined Sontag's reflections on the problematic use of metaphor in the context of the AIDS crisis.⁵⁹ In contrast, the dancing pair, Yacoub's tale and the Parc de l'espoir, and the loving couple demonstrate the positive use of metaphor to show the resilience of the human spirit and the power of love, affection and communication as a response to the greatest of adversities including both mortal illness and death. In the case of *Mortel désir* and *Médecins de cœur*, where both filmmakers were forced to deal with the difficult questions raised by mortality during the very production of their documentaries, these expressive artistic devices are key to a tactful and respectful portrayal of loss and grief within an affirmative appreciation of the value of human life and the importance of individuals.

⁵⁹ See Chapter One, pp.14-15.

Chapter Three: Testimonial Film

In Chapter One it has been suggested that film could be used by those facing the emotional and physical trauma provoked by HIV/AIDS as an effective means of expressing and recording their emotions and thus creating testimonial film. In these situations, the camera can allow PLWHAs to document the process by which they confront their HIV-positive status, realising positive personal change and creating films that can be deeply intimate and may involve a certain experimentation with cinematic form. This chapter will first define and explore testimony through a range of examples of HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature, a popular means of creative expression used by PLWHAs to confront the virus and its significations, in order to establish the key structural and thematic characteristics of the genre. This will help to reveal the specificities and potential advantages of creating a *cinematic* form of HIV/AIDS-related testimony and in turn provide an analytical framework in which three testimonial films by two Québécois PLWHAs will be compared and contrasted. This analysis will demonstrate how the unique documental and creative capabilities of film can be exploited to create different forms of testimony that foster communities of listening and sharing, as well as showing how film as an exploratory process can be applied to real-life situations with very different outcomes.

Defining and exploring testimony in the context of the AIDS crisis

The trauma of the Holocaust has been key to the theorisation of notions of testimony and has provided significant models for the analysis of subsequent crises and traumatic events. The writing of Shoshona Felman and Dori Laub provides a particularly useful starting point for an understanding of testimony in the context of the AIDS crisis. In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Felman and Laub write extensively on the act of creating testimony in the wake of the Holocaust, outlining the circumstances under which it is enacted and its varied manifestations. In the chapter entitled 'Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening', Laub outlines testimony as a revelatory speech act, whereby the vocalisation of one's feelings in relation to a

lived experience of trauma externalises complex and ambiguous emotions; this oral process allows the speaker to begin to explore and comprehend their relationship with a harrowing experience, thus rejecting 'their enslavement to the fate of their victimization' and gaining control over their trauma (Felman and Laub, 1992: 70-71). This vocalisation necessarily implies a listening figure who receives and thereby validates the testimony. The catharsis that testimony affords is thus based on an essential act of sharing that permits the traumatised individual to lessen the burden of the pain they have suffered. In the chapter entitled 'Education and Crisis, Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching', Felman suggests that this definition of testimony is one that can be expanded to include artistic works and other forms of expression (Felman and Laub, 1992: 5). She therefore proposes a concurrent, expanded definition of testimony that involves a supplementary stage of reflection upon the emotions expressed during the initial speech act. This reflection, which can be enacted using a range of artistic and creative media, can provide those experiencing trauma with the opportunity to develop their testimony and gain a deeper understanding of its significance.

Certain prominent voices belonging to the North American AIDS activist movement have directly equated the suffering endured by the Jews at the hands of the Nazis to that endured by queer minorities at the hands of HIV, most notably ACT-UP founder Larry Kramer (1989), who describes the AIDS crisis as a form of gay Holocaust permitted, and implicitly sanctioned, by the indifference of governments and health authorities. Other voices, including Leo Bersani (1988: 201) David Caron (2001: 103-04) and Ross Chambers (1998: 2) have employed more nuanced comparative approaches, using specific aspects of the Holocaust and antisemitism to understand the rationale behind responses to HIV/AIDS that vilify gay men. It is clear that both the Holocaust and the AIDS crisis subjected marginalised societal groups to great pain and suffering, both physical and emotional, individual and collective. The concept of testimony provided by Felman and Laub thus has distinct relevance for all those involved in the AIDS crisis. Living with HIV/AIDS can provoke a range of complex and potentially damaging emotions that stem from the threats posed by HIV to a PLWHA's physical health, state of mind and social status. Creating testimony as a speech act has been a means of substantially assisting those traumatised by HIV/AIDS

to understand and manage what they have to endure. Meanwhile, recording this process in an artistic form of testimonial text has greatly facilitated the establishment and development of wider communities of listening and remembering, in which all those traumatised by HIV/AIDS (including both PLWHAs with direct experience of HIV, as well as their close family and friends, who experience the virus indirectly) can congregate and share experience and solidarity.

In *The Nearness of Others: Searching for Tact and Contact in the Age of HIV*, David Caron explores different forms of HIV disclosure, the challenges they pose to PLWHAs and the influence of the shifting social, societal and clinical contexts in which the act occurs. Illuminating his thoughts using his own experiences as a PLWHA, and using a range of examples of HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature as touchpoints for discussion, Caron demonstrates how the process of storytelling allows PLWHAs to cathartically produce and assign their own forms of meaning to their condition, to form communities based around the social act of testifying, and to continually adapt to the complex and ever-changing realities imposed by their condition.⁶⁰ In *Facing It: AIDS Diaries and the Death of the Author*, Ross Chambers identifies AIDS writing as a form of prophylaxis that allows writers to depict the encroaching signs of illness that mark their bodies through the written word and make an empowering choice to live with their situation and thus reject succumbing to martyrdom.⁶¹ The written word appears to be one of the most (if not *the* most) frequently used and favoured means of creative expression used by MSM in confronting HIV. An international corpus of HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature bears witness to the intensity and intricacy of the trauma experienced (and the associated stories told) by those touched by HIV, particularly prior to the introduction and dissemination of life-saving combination therapy in the mid-1990s. These texts, ones that develop the

⁶⁰ 'We don't try to uncover the meaning of these stories but, rather, produce these stories – and produce them as one would fictions – to make up the meanings of HIV and AIDS [...] To share [these stories] is a matter not of unveiling some kind of truth but of making and remaking knowledge together in order to serve our needs, as different, situational, and ephemeral as they may be' (Caron, 2014: 133-34).

⁶¹ 'Given the direness of the syndrome, such writing – the "writing of AIDS" – can only be understood as (a) an attempt to represent the syndrome's effects in the immediacy of their direness so as (b) to emphasize the significance of a choice to live with AIDS, to write it and to undergo an author's death, in preference to an alternative that is regarded as worse: the choice of witnessing over victimhood' (Chambers, 1998: 17).

founding concept of testimony, that of a one-to-one conversation, into a wider-reaching, more democratised, community-based form of trauma vocalisation, not only leave a tangible trace of the experience remembered by the traumatised individual, but also offer the writers the possibility of sharing their testimonial texts with wider audiences. Further underscoring the group dynamic of the genre, many of the authors of these works identify as MSM, suggesting that testimonial literature was created by, and circulated particularly amongst, MSM populations globally as a means of facing the AIDS crisis together. Taking a variety of literary formats including those of diary, autobiography, monologue or poetry, and covering a host of emotions, the texts reflect the concerted effort made by those within MSM populations (or by those connected to them) to focus public attention on the realities of life as intimately and immediately experienced by MSM PLWHAs.⁶²

HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature covers a gamut of negative emotions: shock, fear of stigma, grief, anger and sadness. The sense of stupefaction that follows the discovery of one's own HIV-positive status can be conveyed through self-questioning, with writers asking themselves how the infection occurred, what the diagnosis could potentially imply and what they have done to deserve such a fate. This shock can lead to the denial and total rejection by writers of their HIV-positive status. *À l'ami qui ne m'a pas sauvé la vie* (1990), a semi-autobiographical text by the French writer and gay PLWHA Hervé Guibert, details his coming to terms with his HIV-positive status and the hope that he misguidedly invests in a scientific acquaintance who promises a cure to his condition. Guibert speaks of his strong aversion to the act of disclosure; to his mind, it is the very admission of one's seropositivity that endows HIV with such power:

⁶² I am not proposing that the brief selection of HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature featured in this chapter is representative of all HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature, nor is it representative of all emotions experienced by PLWHAs, gay or otherwise. Ross Chambers (1998: 18) notes how that the vast majority of the corpus of HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature has been written by white, middle-class gay males ('the only group sufficiently empowered to be able to write, and to publish, amid the daily struggle to survive') and is therefore relatively homogenous. Nevertheless, these examples of literature are vital to gaining an idea of what living with HIV/AIDS in the pre-1996 era entailed on a personal and emotional level.

Mais l'aveu comprenait quelque chose d'atroce : dire qu'on était malade ne faisait qu'accréditer la maladie, elle devenait réelle tout à coup, sans appel, et semblait tirer sa puissance et ses forces destructrices du crédit qu'on lui accordait. De plus c'était un premier pas dans la séparation qui devait conduire au deuil. (Guibert, 1990: 175)

Disclosure thus constitutes a recognition of one's fragility and mortality, and that in turn opens a Pandora's Box of overwhelming questions and emotions.

The stigmatising nature of HIV is a characteristic that emerges strongly across HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature through PLWHAs' fears of being judged by society and subjected to societal, familial or sexual isolation. *Les Nuits fauves* (1989), an autobiographical text by the French filmmaker and PLWHA Cyril Collard, based on his life as a bisexual, HIV-positive, self-confessed hedonist, documents his stormy relationship with Laura, a young, unstable girl who becomes his lover. The drama of the text stems from Collard's potential transmission of HIV to Laura, an event that leaves him feeling guilty and dishonest. Collard expresses the shame he feels in being unable to admit his positive status to Laura and in knowingly putting her health at risk:

J'étais lâche : je croyais venir vers Laura lavé des souillures de mes nuits, mais je lui imposais en silence la pourriture de mon sang. Je crachais mon virus en elle et je ne disais rien. Ce silence me hantait. Quand je voulais lui parler, je ne pouvais pas : elle venait juste d'avoir dix-huit ans, je ne voyais qu'une innocence abusée, une vie foutue. (Collard, 1989: 70)

In the case of *Les Nuits fauves*, Collard initiates a form of self-isolation as a way of atoning for his dishonesty.

Feelings of fear are also aroused by the wide range of unanswerable questions that an HIV-positive diagnosis poses to the health and wellbeing of PLWHAs. Accounts detail the panic that stems from the sudden uncertainty of lifespan, the probable loss of physical autonomy and vitality and the gruesome

decline towards a miserable death that potentially awaits the writer. Upon discovering a possible sign of KS, Collard reacts with disbelief and delirium:

Je me déshabillai, pris une douche. En m'essuyant, je vis un bouton mauve sur mon biceps gauche. Je murmurai : « Non, c'est pas possible, ça peut pas être ça... » J'étais couché mais je ne dormais pas. Je sentais la mort s'approcher ; non pas avec les yeux de Laura, mais comme deux images mélangées : la mort abstraite, unie, et sur elle les yeux de Laura incrustés. (Collard, 1989: 48)

Collard expresses a fear that is all encompassing and hallucinatory, a description that conveys the virus's ability to haunt those it touches and to distort their perceptions of reality.

Grief is another emotion that consistently emerges from testimonial literature. In such texts, it is often clear that the writers live constantly in the shadow of death. As infection rates and AIDS-related deaths rose exponentially amongst MSM throughout the 1980s and 1990s, HIV killed entire LGBT friendship groups and communities, so that writers are often coming to terms not only with their own mortality but with the untimely deaths of numerous acquaintances as well. British filmmaker, artist and PLWHA Derek Jarman attempts to vocalise his feelings of grief in his 1994 autobiographical work *Chroma*, a poetic essay that was written as he was living with CMV, an AIDS-related condition that leads to loss of sight. The text explores colours, the symbolic values he attributes to them and their relation to his declining health and eyesight. In his discussion of the colour blue, Jarman considers the passing of a whole host of friends:

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. [...] 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. (Jarman, 2000: 115-16)

Jarman's feelings of grief are compounded by the sheer number of friends who have died before their time. His poetic use of poignant sensory imagery (such as 'parched' and 'petrified') vividly renders his grief, whilst his emphasis on the colour blue underscores the tragic melancholy of the scene. Similarly in *Le Cœur éclaté*, gay Québécois author and non-PLWHA Michel Tremblay describes the sorrow felt by the protagonist Jean-Marc at the sight of his former lover, Luc, now hospitalised from AIDS and visibly advancing rapidly towards death:

Méconnaissable. C'était le mot qui me trottait toujours dans la tête quand j'entrais dans cette chambre. Ce visage avait été si beau. *Si beau!* Les pommettes étaient désormais inexistantes, la bouche avait perdu sa couleur et sa forme pleine, le cou se plissait et, surtout, je pouvais lire la mort dans son regard passé du brun noisette au noir profond. (Tremblay, 1989: 37, italics in original)

Tremblay's novel, one that has a strong autobiographical base, demonstrates how HIV/AIDS-related testimonial texts do not necessarily have to be penned by PLWHAs and that those witnessing the AIDS crisis at close hand through the experiences of friends or loved ones will have their own need to vocalise their trauma.

Some examples of testimonial literature convey a tangible sense of the writer's anger at the perceived lack of interest being paid by governments and health authorities to the suffering of those touched by HIV/AIDS. In *Corps à corps* (1987) the French gay writer and PLWHA Alain Emmanuel Dreuilhe takes aim at US medical researchers working on the development of HIV/AIDS treatments, and their apparent concern with personal credit and career advancement rather than the wellbeing of PLWHAs:

Je regrette à présent d'avoir lu, dans un magazine, un reportage sur les conflits internes du Center for Disease Control d'Atlanta, le Taverny américain du SIDA; j'ai pris tardivement conscience à cette

occasion de l'indifférence de certains de mes maréchaux à l'égard des besoins humains des malades. Comment ne pas frissonner en constatant que ces chercheurs, notre seul espoir officiel, sont bien souvent obsédés par leurs rivalités personnelles ou théoriques ou par les perspectives lucratives de leurs recherches. (Dreuilhe, 1987: 29)

It is also apparent that any of the emotions described above have the potential to provoke an all-encompassing feeling of sadness. The overwhelming negativity of the experience of living with (and dying from) AIDS can result in depression, exhaustion, manic behaviour and the sense of a total loss of direction. In 1996, US author Harold Brodkey published *This Wild Darkness: The Story of my Death*, a testimonial text written as a diary spanning a two-year period. In it, Brodkey, who lived with his wife but who also had sex with men, expresses the depression he experienced as he came to terms with the harsh realities of being a PLWHA:

Sometimes I couldn't work at all, couldn't focus, and I would cry, but only a bit, and crawl back to bed, or if I was working in bed I would cover my eyes with my hands and lie still and breath and doze and then try again to work. I must admit I felt truly accursed. [...] Endless sickness without death is more sickening then I would have imagined. (Brodkey, 1996: 94-95)

HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature also covers a host of positive emotions: appreciation, elation and calm. A deep sense of gratitude is often conveyed by PLWHAs whose seropositivity obliges them to assign new values to the fulfilling moments that life has to offer, no matter how small, fleeting or seemingly insignificant. Feelings of appreciation co-exist with determination and resilience, with PLWHAs refusing to have their spirit broken and dignity stolen by AIDS. *Borrowed Time: An AIDS Memoir* (1988) an autobiographical work by the American gay writer Paul Monette, details the declining health and ensuing death of his partner, Roger Horwitz. Monette describes how, towards the end of Roger's life, the couple found solace in the simple fact that they were, for the time being,

still both alive and together. Returning home from an extended stay in hospital, Monette revels ecstatically in the minutiae of daily life:

The ritual of homecoming [from the hospital] was an aching delight, from the dog turning inside out and whimpering to the tramp upstairs past the coral tree. I remember when we got into the back bedroom and sat down together on the bed, facing the garden, we laughed to think he was home, our heads tilted against each other as we savoured having come again through fire. It was perhaps the last moment of full joy, but I can still taste the triumph of it. (Monette, 1988: 321)

The achieving of a state of calm often stands as the outcome to HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature, with writers discussing how they are able to cope with and even overcome the emotional fallout of HIV/AIDS by living in the moment and embracing a form of present-ness that provides them with spiritual and mental balance. In *And The Band Played On: Politics, People and the AIDS Epidemic*, Shilts dramatises testimony, interviews and public records to narrate the early years of the AIDS epidemic as seen through the eyes of real-life activists, PLWHAs, politicians and scientists. One such interview records the feelings of PLWHA Gary Walsh, a gay San Franciscan psychotherapist, who was one of the first PLWHAs to organise support networks for the city's PLWHA community. Prior to his death, Walsh voices his feelings of wholeness and calm:

There have been some incredibly special times during the past few months that leave me very, very rich: spots I could not have gotten without the spots that are on my leg [...] It seems amazing to me how rich this time can be, how much I've enjoyed touching that inner self [...] And all the hell you bear along the way, including this fucking disease, it all seems to be helping to get me to a spot where I can rest peacefully, whether it's living or whether it's dead. (Shilts, 2007: 230)

Many writers use metaphor to assign meaning to and thus better understand their condition. These metaphors, ones that resonate with the discursive responses to HIV/AIDS studied in Chapter One, can be used to express both

positive and negative feelings and often revolve around a number of recurring tropes, including that of the uphill struggle, the journey of discovery, the weathering of a storm, the walking of a tightrope and the performance of normality. The metaphor of warfare is one of the most popular of these, with PLWHAs often describing their body as being under attack from HIV, an interpretation which creates a corresponding need to defend them self with military precision. In *AIDS and its Metaphors*, Susan Sontag positions the use of military-inspired metaphor as an overwhelmingly negative means of confronting HIV/AIDS that alienates and demonises PLWHAs.⁶³ The recurring use of the metaphor across a range of testimonial texts, however, would suggest that the trope can also be used positively. In *Chroma*, Derek Jarman uses the metaphorical properties of colour, referring particularly to the hues of the natural environment of the desolate shingle beach on which he lives in Dungeness, Kent. His poetic discussion of whiteness, symbolic of a violent and invasive form of purity, evokes the draining and devastating force of HIV, and has particular affinities with his feelings of existing in a storm on the boundary between life and death:

In the first white light of dawn I turn white as a sheet, as I swallow the white pills to keep me alive... attacking the virus which is destroying my white blood cells. The wind has blown without end for five days now, a cold north wind in June. The sea, whipped into a thousand white horses, attacks the shore. [...] leaves are blackened and the red poppies too, the roses are wilting, here today and gone tomorrow [...] I am shut in, to walk in the garden hurts my tired lungs. (Jarman, 2000: 19)

At first glance, Jarman's use of the metaphorical properties of warfare and whiteness appears to exaggerate his feelings of vulnerability, isolation and hurt in the face of a combative HIV and thus exert a broadly negative influence on his emotional and mental wellbeing. However, Jarman's repeated exploration of his chosen metaphors over the course of *Chroma* allow him to assign meaning to,

⁶³ See Chapter One, pp.14-15.

and thus squarely confront, the emotions stirred by the virus, both positive and negative, enabling him to achieve a vital and beneficial sense of closure prior to his death.

These examples of testimonial literature demonstrate the important place of the culture of testimony within the AIDS crisis and the experiences of those living with HIV. The existence of such a varied corpus suggests that the process of creating and sharing testimony is one that allowed writers and audiences, particularly those belonging to gay communities, to instigate both an individual and a collective catharsis. All of the texts demonstrate how writers were able to make sense of the chaos that their HIV-positive status provoked through the exploratory process of writing. As Hervé Guibert concisely puts it in his 1992 text *CytomégaloVirus: Journal d'hospitalisation*:

Faire de la torture mentale (la situation dans laquelle je me trouve, par exemple) un sujet d'étude, pour ne pas dire une œuvre, rend la torture un peu plus supportable. (Guibert, 1992: 54)

Creating HIV/AIDS-related testimonial film

The examples of testimonial literature demonstrate the need felt by those living with trauma to articulate and share their feelings and the benefits they derived from engaging in such a process. However, the written word is not the only means of creating a testimonial text. The development of lightweight, portable cameras for personal use during the latter half of the twentieth century (marked by pioneering formats such as Super 8 during the 1960s and later by the widespread introduction of video camcorder technology in the 1980s) made film an important new alternative to writing and an accessible and attractive medium of expression for PLWHAs seeking to explore their condition. In comparison with the written word, film can present those wishing to process their trauma a potentially greater opportunity to symbolically fulfil their desire for self-representation, both in the personal, emotional sense (self-revelation) and the political sense (making oneself felt). In *Reframing Bodies: AIDS, Bearing Witness, and the Queer Moving Image*, Roger Hallas (2009: 18) outlines how filmmakers seeking to subvert disempowering and controlling representations of PLWHAs, in particular those

circulated on television, could employ film to uniquely interrupt the conventions of the media that most frequently disenfranchised and erased PLWHAs from considerations of the AIDS crisis, thus reframing conceptions of their bodies to liberating effect. Chapter One highlighted the widespread absence of PLWHAs from coverage of the AIDS crisis provided by mainstream media outlets. PLWHAs, who felt marginalised and ignored by the media, experienced a corresponding urge to create and distribute their own narratives. Using film to record testimony thus affords PLWHAs the opportunity to adopt and exploit more dominant means of communication, potentially providing a sense of self-affirmation and validation. Hallas further proposes that the unique possibilities of film to reframe (both literally and metaphorically) the PLWHA can also transform their relationship with their audiences. As opposed to inviting them to simply witness their experiences, as is the case in testimonial literature, the filmmaker can manipulate the multidimensional discursive zone unique to their chosen medium to place their audience in 'an intersubjective space in which spectatorship may constitute an ethical counter with an other [sic]' (2009: 19-20). Film thus offers viewers greater potential to transgress the boundary that separates themselves from the filmmaker and move towards a veritable interaction and exchange with their experiences on a deeply affective sensorial, emotional and philosophical level.

This application of film may have resonated particularly strongly in Québec, where the heritage of film as an instrument of collaborative self-examination and liberation is strong. In *Screening Québec*, Scott MacKenzie (2004: 112-15) outlines how, during the 1940s and 1950s, film was used in Québec as a catalyst to permit and encourage citizens to discuss and interrogate questions relating to their society. The advent of ciné-clubs, private members' societies that were able to circumvent censorship laws and screen 'provocative' films proscribed by the government and Church, permitted those seeking intellectual stimulation to congregate, watch and discuss films relating to contemporary issues. MacKenzie (2004: 148-51) also suggests that the development of accessible video technology from the 1960s onwards allowed amateur filmmakers to reject the controlled, homogenised narratives that characterised cinema during *la Grande noirceur* and propose their own new and diverse conceptions of Québec society. Citing works such as *VTR St.-Jacques:*

Opération boule de neige (Bonnie Sherr Klein, 1969), MacKenzie identifies the films that emerged from Challenge for Change, a filmmaking programme orchestrated by the NFB, as examples of the democratisation of film that afforded marginalised demographics, armed with portable cameras, the opportunity to collectively produce movies that explored both their personal and shared identities. This emphasis on the revelatory process of filmmaking (and not necessarily the final product) allowed Quebecers and Canadians to experience self-affirmation through self-representation via the NFB's programme. The tendency of Québec filmmakers to turn the gaze of their cameras upon themselves is also evident in the films belonging to the school of *autofiction*. Straddling the boundary between fiction and documentary film, the movement is typified by *À tout prendre* (Claude Jutra, 1964), a semi-autobiographical story in which Jutra played himself and as a means of exploring and coming to terms with his real-life homosexuality through the dramatic processes of filmmaking and storytelling. These films set an influential precedent that held great potential to encourage those traumatised by HIV/AIDS in Québec to examine their situation through the physicality and instantaneity of capture by the camera lens. To those experiencing gradual, progressive or rapid disintegration, both physical and mental, the camera represented the possibility of lasting testimony, the chance to document and freeze one's physical presence, thoughts and feelings forever in time, symbolically combatting progressive physical and mental disintegration through the enduring vitality of cinema.

The home movie and the creative film

Regardless of personal and professional background, testimonial film affords anyone the opportunity to create a cinematic record and an exploration of their relationship with HIV/AIDS, provided they can access the necessary basic tools. The democratised nature of the genre means that testimonial films may be highly varied, produced with minimal technical skills and with little to no budget, and never destined for distribution. Nevertheless, despite the potential for variation, HIV/AIDS-related testimonial film can be broadly divided into two categories: the home movie and the creative film.

The hand-held video camera offers PLWHAs the opportunity to spontaneously and instantaneously express and record their emotions in the form of a video diary; film, however complex analysis may reveal its 'language' to be, appears, in the first instance at least, to be characterised by mimetic transparency. Testimonial films that fall into the category of the home movie can be characterised by their stripped-back look and minimal (if any) editing, mise-en-scène or production value. This is not to suggest that home movies are a form of film to be looked down upon; on the contrary, they can fulfil a number of different functions for those creating testimonial films and for those studying them as historical records.⁶⁴ Both the home movie and the creative film have been used by Anglophone Canadian PLWHAs to great effect. Between 1990 and 1992, Vancouverite and doctor Peter Jepson-Young recorded over a hundred video journals documenting his experiences as a PLWHA and his declining health. These video journals were broadcast weekly on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation network nationwide as a series entitled *Dr Peter Diaries*, allowing Canadians the opportunity to better understand HIV through the problems faced by Jepson-Young, affectionately known by Canadians simply as 'Dr Peter', and his insights into life, love, friendship and mortality in the shadow of AIDS. The series provided an often unflinching documentation of life living with, and dying from, the condition; towards the end of the series, Dr Peter (who was diagnosed in 1986 and died in 1992) can be seen preparing funeral plans with his friends and family, visiting the church where he plans to be buried and lying in hospital beds, increasingly incapacitated and deformed by a host of opportunistic infections. In spite of these difficult situations, he remains calm, rational and appreciative of his life and, relative to his PLWHA friends who find themselves in similar or worse situations, his luck in staying alive for so long. As opportunistic viral infections robbed him of his sight at a relatively early stage during the series, his testimonial videos were shot with the assistance of a production team. Whilst this method of production necessarily implies some degree of staging, Dr Peter appears throughout his journals to come to terms with his situation through

⁶⁴ 'Amateur film provides a vital access point for academic historiography in its trajectory from official history to the more variegated and multiple practices of popular history, a concretization of memory into artefacts that can be remobilized, recontextualized, and reanimated' (Zimmermann, 2008: 1).

spontaneous vocalisation and discussion. In relation to Felman and Laub's definition of testimony, his journals therefore lie close to the initial definition of testimony as a speech act. The minimal editing of the clips, the recurrent setting of Dr Peter's house, as well as the use of natural lighting and a relatively basic quality of video tape, mean that they retain the feel of a home movie. In 1993, Dr Peter's video journals were edited posthumously and released as a 45-minute documentary entitled *The Broadcast Tapes of Dr Peter*. The documentary was well received by the public and film critics, being nominated in the Documentary (Feature) category at the 1994 Academy Awards. The film exemplifies how video can be used as a tool to permit those undergoing the harrowing experience of dying from AIDS the chance to better understand their situation and to cathartically share their stories with larger audiences. The release of the documentary version also demonstrates how home movies can be repackaged into longer films so that larger cinema-going audiences may witness the testimonies and partake in the shared activity of witnessing. Producer Alan Ginsberg used footage of Dr Peter's funeral as the conclusion to the film, affording viewers a sense of closure to his story that the original *Dr Peter Diaries* series could not.

Whilst home movies are characterised by the relative simplicity of their technique and by their strong sense of realism, creative testimonial films are notable for their exploitation of the artistic potential of film as a means of augmenting the impact of the emotions that emerge from the process of bearing witness. Colour, music, sound, editing and manipulation of footage can all be exploited by PLWHAs to add depth, mood, symbolism and dramatic impact to their testimonial texts as a means of visually embodying and imparting the sensorial elements of their HIV/AIDS-related experiences and emotions. The resulting films can be experimental, dream-like and highly surreal, drawing on a range of different media to create intertextual collages that attempt to capture the essence of the emotions portrayed. Since his HIV-positive diagnosis in 1988, Torontonion, experimental filmmaker and PLWHA Mike Hoolboom has created a host of films that stand as a testimony to his experiences as a PLWHA. Hoolboom is one of many artists prominent in the AIDS video art scene of the late 1980s and early 1990s in North America. Films produced in this context were often experimental, sexually explicit and politicised, with artists, including American

Gregg Bordowitz and Canadian Richard Fung, openly criticising the perceived indifference and homophobia of government, conservatives, the pharmaceutical industry and the general public, as well as interrogating predominant HIV/AIDS discourses and conceptions of gay sex. Their videos mocked the establishment and rallied support for protest, standing as symbolic manifestations of artistic and radical resistance to the sense of oppression experienced by PLWHAs. Of particular interest is one of Hoolboom's earlier HIV/AIDS-related testimonial films, *Frank's Cock* (1993). The film depicts a young, unnamed narrator speaking directly and in graphic detail to the camera about his partner, Frank, their shared sexual experiences and Frank's impending death from AIDS. The narrator, speaking in a dark space with only his face lit, is surrounded by shifting imagery taken from popular gay culture and pornography, as well as scientific footage depicting the subdivision of cells. This creative juxtaposition both celebrates homosexual erotica and provides a poignant commentary on the fragility of life and on the fear, pain and devastation left by HIV/AIDS in the social, sexual and personal lives of gay men across the world. *Frank's Cock* effectively demonstrates how film can creatively assemble images and sound to produce documentary testimony layered with rich and highly engaging metaphor. Hoolboom himself does not feature in the film; the narrator is in fact an actor, dramatising the actual story and life-situation of one of Hoolboom's friends, whose partner was dying from AIDS. However, even though *Frank's Cock* tells a story that is ostensibly not Hoolboom's to tell, the film can still be considered as an example of testimonial film, since for Hoolboom, it is the actual process of creating film and recounting stories that allows him to understand his own condition and emotions.⁶⁵ In relation to Felman and Laub's exploration of testimony, his film provides an example of testimonial text, a form of testimony that (in this instance) uses creativity and plays with narration to elaborate on the message being conveyed, but that still retains the essential spirit of vocalisation and disclosure. *Frank's Cock* won the award for Best Canadian Short at the 1994 Toronto International Film Festival, demonstrating once more how testimonial film

⁶⁵ 'I didn't handle the news [of my HIV-positive diagnosis] all that well. I kept it to myself and waited to die. Drank a lot. Phoned up a bunch of people I'd slept with and passed the word along. And began a frantic tear of short films that's lasted till now' (de Bruyn, 1993, cited in Waugh, 2006: 316).

can fulfil a dual role, assisting those living with HIV/AIDS trauma and successfully sharing HIV/AIDS experience with an audience as a means of educating the wider public.

The brief study of HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature pointed strongly towards the community dynamic of the genre, with texts being written by those belonging to gay communities about their experiences as MSM living with HIV/AIDS. It can thus be presumed that these writers sought to address primarily, though not exclusively, other members of these populations. Whilst written forms of testimony are created and consumed principally by individuals, its cinematic forms can speak to larger audiences more publicly and efficiently, resulting in texts that are more shareable and open to group discussion and interaction. Both home movies and creative films are aimed towards specific group audiences, whether small or large, and this can result in the creation of engaging and intimate works around which implicated communities can easily congregate, converse and testify themselves.

This chapter will examine the works of two Québec filmmakers who used film very differently to create testimonial film relating to their experiences as PLWHAs. Louis Dionne's film *Comment vs dirais-je ?* (1995) provides an example of testimonial home movie that starkly records a key moment in his coming to terms with his HIV-positive status. In contrast, the works of Esther Valiquette, *Récit d'A* (1990) and *Le Singe bleu* (1992), stand out as examples of creative testimonial film that represent the filmmaker's consideration of her HIV-positive status through deeply imaginative and symbolic journeys. In light of the testimonial literature examined in the introduction, this chapter will clarify how the varying forms of testimonial film can represent and negotiate the trauma of HIV/AIDS and what the films reveal about the emotions confronted by the filmmakers. The chapter will also establish, in respect of Dionne, how his film was received and interpreted once shared with an audience, showing how the meanings of HIV/AIDS-related testimonial film may shift when moved from the private into the public sphere.

Comment vs dirais-je ? (Louis Dionne, 1995)

Louis Dionne is a gay Montrealer who learnt of his HIV-positive status at the age of thirty. His professional background lies in the technical aspects of film production and his work as a sound engineer at Productions Réalisations Indépendantes de Montréal. Described by Thomas Waugh (Waugh, 2006: 404) as ‘a bold and unsettling documentary’, Dionne’s film *Comment vs dirais-je ?* demonstrates how the video camera can not only record and thus contribute to the process of understanding the PLWHA’s traumatic situation, but can actually play a performative role by initiating the oral process of testimony. Rather than documenting his own reactions to his illness, the video camera is employed by Dionne as a blunt instrument to kick-start the creation of testimony as a speech act between himself and his family. This provocative (and even aggressive) use of the video camera is central to the film’s reception by an audience and its potential interpretations. The film, which generated great public interest and debate upon its release, was nominated in the category of Best Video at the 1996 Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois. The analysis of his film will use information gathered through an interview that I conducted with Dionne in August 2013.

The cinematography and mise-en-scène of *Comment vs dirais-je ?* is basic and straightforward. Filming them at their holiday chalet, Dionne sits his mother and father in front of his video camera and tells them for the first time that he is HIV-positive, recording their reactions live. Almost the entirety of the film is a single, unedited take of Dionne’s parents in mid-close-up. Dionne’s father, Antoine, is a tall, slender, bespectacled man who appears to be in his sixties, whilst Dionne’s mother, Thérèse, is a petite, grey-haired woman apparently of similar age. However, the pair’s summery clothes and tanned complexions suggest that they are active, lively and young at heart. Both Antoine and Thérèse, responding to their son seated off-camera, look slightly to the left of the frame for the duration of the film, hinting at the constant presence of a third person playing the role of an interviewer or, as it turns out, interrogator. In terms of the visual features of the scene, Dionne has seated his parents on a wooden bench; in front of them is a table covered in an oilcloth, patterned with a scattering of small orange flowers, upon which fruit, a teapot and a bowl of biscuits are placed. Directly behind them is a white, wood-panelled wall with a window bordered with lace curtains that features a geometric, striped pattern. Dionne’s parents appear

to be in a traditional, stable and happy relationship, with the overall qualities of the scene suggestive of middle-class normality and respectability. The composition and stillness of the shot are reminiscent of a traditional family portrait, allowing the viewer's attention to focus squarely on Antoine and Thérèse. The film opens with Dionne and his parents exchanging pleasantries, with all three participants joking about the process of filming and being filmed. However, it is not long before Dionne's sudden disclosure of his HIV-positive status to his parents introduces the main content of his film. In the wake of this revelation, it is Antoine who speaks the most, with Thérèse listening intently. Antoine first asks his son to clarify the tests that he underwent to establish his seropositivity. He then bluntly instructs him not to contaminate other people and follows this demand by asking who is aware of Dionne's HIV-positive status. He next turns his attention to the treatments available to his son and the potential timescale for his son's health to deteriorate. Dionne's reply, that he could live for one year or fifteen, visibly stuns both his parents. Antoine concludes by asking his son whether he can still engage in sexual relations and whether there are organisations in Montréal that can assist him with his condition.

Antoine's responses demonstrate some of the concerns that a parent may initially have when confronting the HIV-positive status of an offspring. His questions suggest a disbelief at his son's news, a fear of his being subjected to serophobic judgement and isolation and a broad concern with his welfare. They are also no doubt a means of avoiding the profound and amorphous panic that such a revelation (in the era preceding the advent of effective combination therapies) could elicit; Antoine thus evokes the Kristevan figure of the phobic adult who employs speech to avoid the troublesome realities of physical impermanence.⁶⁶ The emotion that is arguably the most evident in the body language of both Antoine and Thérèse is sadness. The couple begin the interview in good spirits, smiling and speaking with animation. The shift in their facial expression, general demeanour and verbal response to their son's revelation is so pronounced that it is difficult to remain unaffected by their very visible sorrow. The energy quickly drains from their faces, their postures become notably less

⁶⁶ See Chapter One, pp.15-16.

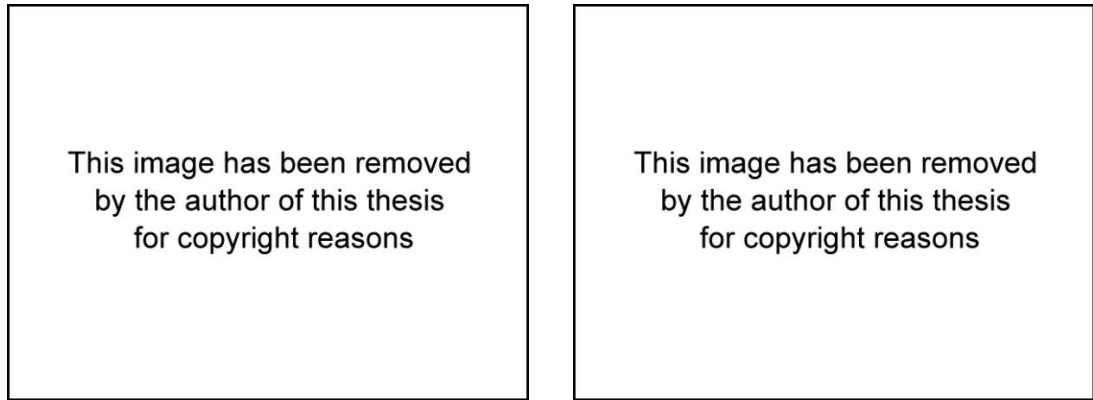


Illustration 5

confident and they shift to speaking slowly and gravely, with Thérèse hardly speaking at all (illustration 5). Dionne momentarily leaves the kitchen towards the end of the film to allow his parents to express their feelings alone with the camera. However, during his absence, both parents barely say a word and spend most of the time either silent or sobbing. Since the camera is left running, they are not left to come to terms with the revelation unobserved and are obliged to divulge their feelings without preparation or even conscious consent. The presence of a video camera at such a delicate moment may have problematic consequences. Dionne's film documents the sadness and fear that HIV is capable of inspiring, in a manner that exposes these emotions in their raw and unprocessed state. However, it is this same rawness that can inspire sympathy for Dionne's parents, trapped with little autonomy in the filming process, and that distances the viewer from Dionne himself, as a reaction to his placing his parents in such a situation. The unrelenting focus of the camera on Antoine and Thérèse, combined with his own position off-camera, creates a film that initially appears to say more about the experience of his parents than that of Dionne himself. His treatment of them might even be interpreted as sadistic and designed to cause hurt and even humiliation. The interview as a whole, and in particular the sobbing and long periods of silence on the part of his mother and his father, are so evidently painful that they quickly become uncomfortable to watch, leading the viewer to conclude that such a moment should be conducted in private.

The mixed reactions that *Comment vs dirais-je ?* can inspire stem principally from the discrete specificities of the film. Dionne provides a succinct and powerful snapshot of the effects of one man's HIV-positive status on both his

and his parents' lives. However, the brevity of the film strips it of the context needed to understand Dionne's familial relations and his motivations. Acutely aware that his film could be interpreted negatively, Dionne opens *Comment vs dirais-je ?* with a lengthy piece of explanatory white-on-black text:

Ce film que vous allez voir, je ne l'ai pas fait pour vous, je l'ai fait pour moi car j'en avais besoin. C'était ma façon de reprendre contact avec mes parents, de recréer une intimité qui me permette de leur dire ce qui m'arrivait.

Je suis allé les voir pendant une semaine et au cours de plusieurs tournages, j'ai repris peu à peu contact avec eux. À un certain moment, j'étais prêt, ils étaient prêts, je pouvais leur dire, c'est là que le film commence.

Cette œuvre n'a aucune valeur sinon celle d'avoir été le prétexte d'un partage authentique, il n'était pas destiné à être présenté.

Mes parents se sont prêtés librement à mon expérience, et ce n'est que par la suite, à la demande d'un festival, que nous avons décidé de la faire partager.

The text hints at the complex familial situation that underlies the scene portrayed in Dionne's film. The video footage was in fact just one of a series of tapes that Dionne filmed in conversation with his parents as a means of constructing an improved relationship with them. He did not originally intend to release his video publicly and only did so with his parents' permission. Nevertheless, this information is still not enough to prevent an ethically critical reading of *Comment vs dirais-je ?* and, if anything, the introductory text invites further questioning. The viewer's desire for more information is further amplified by the film's relatively inconclusive ending. After Dionne returns to the room, his parents indicate that, whilst his revelation has come as a great shock, they will help their son as he faces his new life situation. However, this offer of parental assistance still feels tentative and far from conclusive. The moment that *Comment vs dirais-je ?*

records is too complex, raw and unmediated to be properly comprehended by either Dionne's parents or the viewer, even with the context provided for the latter by the on-screen text.

Understanding the purpose and significance of *Comment vs dirais-je ?*

The context needed to more fully understand the significance of the film for its three participants was only made available via a TV talk show. Upon the public release of his film, Dionne and his parents were invited by Radio-Canada to feature on the chat show *Christiane Charette en direct*. Charette is a prominent and popular TV journalist reputed in Québec for her no-nonsense approach to investigating social issues. The Dionne family's appearance on Québec television after the film's release is indicative of the societal discussion and questioning that it provoked. As the interview unfolds, Charette, responding sympathetically to the distress experienced by Dionne's parents, subjects Dionne himself to some aggressive questioning over his motivations. In response, Dionne deconstructs the long-standing dynamics that defined their relationship, including distance, silence and his parents' reluctance to discuss and accept his homosexuality. He continues by discussing the significant sense of emotional, moral and spiritual distance that separates his conservative and devoutly Catholic parents from his own liberal and atheist stance on life.

My conversation with Dionne shed further light on his motivations, ones that were not aired in the Charette interview. He explained how the news of his HIV-positive status at the age of thirty obliged him to confront the brevity of life. Following a period of initial shock, he decided to understand and overcome his feelings through the act of disclosure.⁶⁷ In a similar manner to *Comment vs dirais-je ?*, he informed friends and colleagues of his status in front of a video camera, filming their reactions. A positive, supportive reaction allowed him to establish his interlocutor as someone he could trust as he faced his new life situation. A

⁶⁷ '[Maybe] you would die with suffering, you would be rejected by everyone, you know, the big stuff like that, so it really was a shock, because at that time there was no medication, and all that, so it really was, what was the best perspective, when you have that. So, it brought me to the thinking of, 'well, what do I do? who do I say [sic]? who do I tell that I'm HIV, and why should I tell them, and what do I have to gain from that?' So I had to deal with this questioning' (Appendix I, p.236).

negative, unsupportive reaction would allow him to cut ties with those who could hamper him in his life as a PLWHA. Dionne's video camera therefore acted as a form of filter that allowed him to critically evaluate his life and his relationships and thus move forward with as much support as possible. These interviews acted as a series of 'practice runs' for the video testimony he would eventually record with his parents.

In the Radio-Canada interview, Dionne reveals to Charette how the urgency of his diagnosis inspired him to make one more attempt to create a form of intimacy and understanding with his parents, before it became too late. Familiar with their refusal to discuss sensitive issues, he considered the video camera and the framework of the interview as his only means of broaching the subject of his status with his parents and of provoking an immediate reaction to the news of his illness, through which mutual feelings of shock, grief and concern could be shared constructively. Dionne spent time with his parents at their holiday chalet filming and interviewing them, discussing a range of issues including homosexuality, communication and familial intimacy. These preliminary interviews allowed him to feel that there was enough understanding between him and his mother and father for the news of his HIV-positive status to be voiced and potentially accepted. However, the 'vs' element of his film's title conveys a double meaning and can be read as an indicator of the hesitation he still felt in deciding either how he should disclose his seropositivity to his parents ('Comment *vous* dirais-je ?', 'how would I tell you?') or whether in fact he would tell them at all ('Comment *versus* dirais-je ?', 'How or *would* I say it?') (my emphasis). From Dionne's perspective, the preliminary interviews served as a means of priming his parents for the revelation of his diagnosis. From their perspective, however, the preliminary interviews did not give any indication of the coming revelation, meaning that the news came as a devastating shock. The explanation of his motivations that Dionne provides during the Charette interview suggests the difficulties that a PLWHA can face when considering who they wish to involve in their new life situation and the fears felt by marginalised people at the prospect of revealing their status and the destabilising reactions that may ensue. The interview also highlights how a seropositive diagnosis can, and often will, fundamentally change an individual's outlook on life, its meanings and its potential.

In addition to clarifying Dionne's motivations for *Comment vs dirais-je ?*, the Charette interview allows the viewer to gain closure on Dionne's revelation and its reception as so graphically depicted in the film. Both Dionne and his parents suggest that the film has had a broadly positive effect on their relationship with each other and on their attitudes to HIV. Both sides concede that, whilst they may still hold very different beliefs, Dionne's disclosure and its capturing on video have brought them closer together. The urgency of Dionne's diagnosis obliged his parents to look beyond their differences with their son to find common ground and to employ a cooperative approach in the face of a situation that was difficult for everyone involved. Together, the trio demonstrate the positivity and determination that can emerge through honesty and frank communication. For Dionne, the disclosure created an intimacy which allowed him to overcome his stubbornness and try to better understand his parents and their outlook on life, while his diagnosis has resulted, on their side, in an increased willingness to listen to his point of view.⁶⁸ For their part, Dionne's parents express an appreciation of the changes brought about by their son's video intervention. In *Comment vs dirais-je ?*, Thérèse barely says a word. In the Charette interview, however, she dominates the conversation, explaining how Dionne's disclosure has strengthened her relationships with both her son and with God.⁶⁹ Antoine mirrors these feelings, stating that both he and Thérèse have put aside their differences to focus on supporting and loving their son in his new life situation. Thérèse's domination of the conversation and obviously strongly-held religious beliefs provide an important insight into the possible reasons for Dionne's previous estrangement from his family. Ultimately though, it is both encouraging and a matter of relief for the viewer of *Comment vs dirais-je ?* to discover that Dionne's parents have succeeded in moving beyond an initial state of devastation (as depicted in the film) towards a position where they can better understand their son's situation and the role that they can play in his life. Thérèse's words show

⁶⁸ 'Avant, j'avais l'impression d'être un peu emprisonné [...] alors que maintenant j'ai plus l'impression que mes parents écoutent ce que moi j'ai envie de faire pis essayent de m'aider comme ils peuvent, tsé.'

⁶⁹ 'Ça m'amène à voir d'avantage, là, les yeux rivés sur, d'abord, l'amour d'avantage de mon fils, dans le but de l'aider, pis de mieux le connaître, pis de surtout puiser les forces dans la foi. C'est avec vraiment la foi, l'amour du seigneur que je peux avancer sur ce terrain-là.'

that her son's homosexuality and HIV-positive status can co-exist with, and even be understood by, her faith. As such, she subverts predetermined ideas surrounding the incompatibility of religion and queer sexualities.

The Charette interview provides proof of the oral testimony that was articulated privately between Dionne and his parents after his disclosure to them on camera. *Comment vs dirais-je ?* can be read as evidence of Dionne's determination to mend fences with his parents and to face HIV united with his family, as well as the primary need felt by PLWHAs to communicate openly about their status. These conversations, be they held with one's loved ones or with cinema-going audiences, are vital to PLWHAs in their development of a better relationship with their condition. The positive outcomes of Dionne's film demonstrate the ability of a specifically cinematic form of testimony to provoke frank and productive face-to-face conversation. In the case of *Comment vs dirais-je ?*, Dionne exploited the instantaneity of film to create a challenging moment of private revelation that subsequently became a talking point in a TV discussion of HIV/AIDS in Québec. An intimate piece of personal and family testimony thus became the occasion for far-reaching public debate.

La Veille électronique: bringing testimony to a wider public

Having witnessed the productive dialogue, both private and public, that his video camera could incite, Dionne set about using the same concept of video testimonial to initiate HIV/AIDS-related conversation and negotiate the trauma caused by the virus on a wider, more sustained, societal level. This idea came to fruition through what became known as *La Veille électronique*. Over the course of the summers of 1996 and 1998, Dionne established a living video installation in the Parc de l'espoir in Montréal's gay Village. The installation consisted of a series of televisions linked to VCR sets and headsets placed around the park. These television sets played video testimonials, recorded by Dionne at a variety of HIV-positive support groups and social events across Québec, of PLWHAs expressing their feelings in relation to HIV/AIDS. During the summer months, The Village is a popular place for Montréalers, both LGBT and non-LGBT, to stroll and savour the convivial atmosphere of the district in the warm evening air. The installation, positioned in the park on the corner of Rue Sainte-Catherine and Rue

Panet, capitalised on this prominent and frequented location. The striking nature of the installation would pique the interest of passers-by, who would then enter the park, wander amongst the testimonials and watch and listen to the interviews as they pleased. The installation sought to create an evolving space in which HIV/AIDS testimony could be created and revealed, producing a profound sense of intimacy in the public heart of the busy city.⁷⁰ Dionne's siting of the exhibition in the Parc de l'espoir further cemented the status of the public park as a space for HIV/AIDS commemoration, discussion and reflection.

Dionne orchestrated the first editions of *La Veille électronique* independently; the success of the event was such that he repeated it in the summer of 2008 and 2009, this time with the backing of the City and a range of organisations linked to the Village. Thanks to the development of technology, the installation was expanded to use lightweight DVDs instead of cumbersome video cassettes. Dionne and his team of volunteers were therefore able to exploit the instantaneity of film technology to expand the project in real time; by filming interviews with passers-by in the park as they reacted to the installation, they were able to feed these new interviews into the television sets, thus producing and broadcasting an ever-expanding number of public testimonies. During the DVD-era of the project, Dionne used artistic design to render the project even more striking and symbolic. Placing TVs at eye-level on poles, he surrounded them with an eclectic mix of old shoes arranged as flower petals, thus turning the screens into large, sunflower-like installations. These unusual and compelling forms underscored the ethos of *La Veille électronique*, a project that allows people from all walks of life (in particular those belonging to Montréal's LGBT population) to congregate, vocalise and share their experiences and thus foster personal and emotional growth in the wake of great collective loss and mourning.⁷¹

⁷⁰ '*La Veille électronique* propose un espace d'échange collectif qui vous permet d'ajouter votre témoignage vidéo dans une sculpture. Cette parole d'expérience unique s'ajoute à celle des autres pour offrir un champ de réflexion évolutif où chacun y cueille des messages l'interpellant sur son passage. Nous cherchons, par le moyen d'une « intimité collective », à explorer et à comprendre comment chacun de nous intègre aujourd'hui la réalité du VIH/sida dans sa vie' (*La Veille électronique*. [no date]).

⁷¹ 'Because the key to healing is to being able to tell your story, the narrative of your life, you know, and be understood, be at least heard, you know. So, and then, that people have their own opinion, it's not that much important that they have their own opinion than you have. But at least

La Veille électronique shares both similarities and differences with *Comment vs dirais-je ?* Both the installation and the film use the video camera as a catalyst for provocation, conversation, understanding and emotional healing. However, unlike Antoine and Thérèse, those who participated in *La Veille électronique* were given the agency to react and contribute to the filming as they desired. This consensual element enabled the installation to be perceived more positively than the ambiguous and potentially troubling *Comment vs dirais-je ?*, a film whose approach to discussing HIV/AIDS raised the ethical question of participant consent in the production of testimony.

Récit d'A (Esther Valiquette, 1990)

Louis Dionne's use of video technology resulted in an HIV/AIDS-related testimonial film that was provocative, raw and distinctly unembellished. In contrast to Dionne, Esther Valiquette was a Québécois filmmaker and PLWHA who used the portable film camera to produce testimonial film that is intricate, highly imaginative, and on occasion surreal. Born in 1962, she grew up in Arthabaska, part of the rural region of Centre-du-Québec. She obtained a degree in visual arts from the University of Montréal, after which she became an on-set film technician. After struggling with illness for five years, she died from AIDS-related conditions in autumn 1994. Valiquette produced a small but significant corpus of short testimonial films relating to HIV/AIDS and her own HIV-positive status during the early 1990s. Her first film, *Récit d'A* (1990) is a phantasmagorical travelogue that recounts a journey she undertook from Montréal to San Francisco and her meeting with Andrew, another PLWHA. Together, they engage in a cathartic process of self-discovery that both reshapes and reaffirms what it means to live with HIV/AIDS. Her second film, *Le Singe bleu* (1992), continues to explore the emotional responses provoked by HIV/AIDS through the framework of the journey. On this occasion, Valiquette's journey to the Greek islands of Crete and Santorini to investigate the remains of the Minoan civilisation situates the AIDS crisis in the context of the long history of catastrophic events endured by humankind. Valiquette's final film, *Extenderis* (1993), can be

you exist, you know, and you said it, and you can see that you're still there and you exist, and you can be more confident about it' (Appendix I, p.265).

summarised as a more general contemplation of humanity's relative insignificance and its subservience to the givens of DNA, space and time, that takes as its starting point the ideas proposed by Richard Dawkins in his 1986 book *The Blind Watchmaker*. An analysis of Valiquette's two specifically HIV/AIDS-related testimonial films, *Récit d'A* and *Le Singe bleu*, will demonstrate how she uses the unique creative potential of film to produce two testimonial films layered with symbolism and metaphor that present HIV/AIDS as a series of shared journeys and experiences.

Valiquette's first testimonial film, *Récit d'A*, won the Premier Prix du Public at the 1991 International Festival of Films and Videos by Women. Released in 1990, the film stands out as one of the first Québec films to squarely confront HIV and marks the beginning of the province's flurry of HIV/AIDS-related cinematic activity that characterised the first half of the 1990s to which this thesis attests.⁷² In spite of its relatively brief twenty-minute duration, *Récit d'A* features an impressive breadth of metaphors, symbols and commentary relating to the emotional experiences of PLWHAs. The film's rich array of image and sound is formed around the overarching structure of Valiquette's journey from Montréal to San Francisco, including also a detour into Arizona. Journeys are immediately suggestive of positive, forward motion and thus imbued with metaphorical connotations of 'getting somewhere' and 'moving on'. The strong, affirmative sense of movement, progress and change that is embedded in the idea of travel renders the framework of the journey a tool that PLWHAs can use to convey a move beyond the initial trauma of an HIV-positive diagnosis towards a point where their new life situation can be better understood. Valiquette's choice of California as her destination, and specifically Death Valley and San Francisco, is highly symbolic, allowing her to confront the significant existential questions posed by her seropositive status in settings that reflect her prevailing mood and situation. In a 1993 interview with *The Gazette*, Valiquette explained her fascination with Death Valley, a vast expanse of desert in Eastern California that is the hottest and driest place in North America. The barren landscape acts as a

⁷² '*Récit d'A* had the impact of a thunderbolt in 1990, catching up for almost a decade of Quebec artistic hibernation on HIV' (Waugh, 2006: 525).

powerful metaphor, symbolising and concretising the emptiness felt by PLWHAs facing a future dominated by unanswered questions, isolation and mortality and giving sense to Valiquette's own condition and her feelings of sorrow and loss.⁷³ Her journey to San Francisco also has symbolic resonance in the context of the global history and narratives of HIV/AIDS. The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s turned the more liberal cities and regions of North America into Meccas for gay men seeking to escape repression and to openly live their sexualities. These densely populated and sexually active gay populations provided a climate in which HIV spread rapidly. The LGBT community of San Francisco in particular was decimated by HIV and the city quickly emerged as one of the epicentres in North America for AIDS mourning and action. Valiquette's journey to the city as an HIV-positive, Québécois female therefore gains additional significance. Her visit to San Francisco, a metaphorical ground zero of AIDS, symbolises the need of PLWHAs to confront the physical disintegration and mortality embodied by HIV/AIDS and thus achieve self-acceptance and closure, as well as to seek and find supportive communities based on shared experience.

Récit d'A consists of a collage of the places, landscapes and conversations that she encounters as she travels. These scenes, the souvenirs of her physical itinerary, document the range of different environments (from urban San Francisco to barren Death Valley) in which she confronted her status as an HIV-positive woman. But Valiquette's decision to film her journey also allowed her to experience and capture unplanned happenings, encounters and testimony, turning the camera out beyond the self to reflect on her journey through that of someone else. Andrew, a PLWHA who she meets in California, is willing to converse with her in interview about his experiences, producing testimony as a speech act that documents his own emotional journey. Valiquette recorded and used this conversation as the basis for much of the dialogue of her film, demonstrating how the framework of the journey can act as a liberating space in which communities of understanding and friendship amongst PLWHAs can manifest themselves spontaneously.

⁷³ 'Death Valley is the youngest desert on the planet. I compared it to the young generation that is being kicked by the virus, that is being "deserted" by this sickness' (Shatenstein, 1993).

HIV/AIDS: a shared journey

Through some remarkable editing and juxtaposition, Valiquette succeeds in blending her experiences of California with those of Andrew to create a moving, imaginative and dreamlike testimonial film that presents both journey and testimony as a shared activity with the power to liberate and empower PLWHAs. By interweaving the footage of her travels around California with extracts of Andrew's testimony, their respective journeys melt into each other, implying a mutually beneficial dialogue between them: Andrew's words explain the motivations behind the images of Valiquette's pilgrimage to California, whilst the imagery in its turn lends Andrew's words a profound emotional effectiveness and vibrancy. This fusion of perspectives creates a unified, hybrid narrative that highlights the universality of experience shared by PLWHAs whilst simultaneously demonstrating the sense of community that can emerge between individuals who share their trauma.⁷⁴ In order to successfully intertwine her experiences with those of Andrew, Valiquette uses further editing, characterised by distinctive montage and a creative selection of frames and footage, to place her consideration of testimony in a world that is distinctly phantasmagorical and symbolic.

To create her dreamlike envisioning of the experiences of a PLWHA, Valiquette uses non-linear montage to skew predominant conceptions of time and space. *Récit d'A* leaps geographically in an instant, from the streets of San Francisco to both Death Valley over three hundred miles away on the California-Nevada border and to the Grand Canyon in Arizona. By leaving the leaps in location blatant and unexplained, she affirms the validity of a subjective vision of the world, the abrupt changes suggesting a transcendence of the normal rules of time and space that highlights the agency of the subject in defining reality. Valiquette's continental crossing also traverses barriers of language. This is reflected by the shifting of the dialogue between English and French, a symbolic compression of the North American continent that effaces linguistic and

⁷⁴ This universality is further reflected in the film's title. *Récit d'A* both literally signifies 'the Story of A', representing Andrew, and, through phonetic resemblance to the French acronym for AIDS, *SIDA*, constitutes a play on words that equates to 'the story of AIDS'; Andrew's story thus becomes the story of all those touched by HIV.

geographical borders in favour of openness to communication. In addition to manipulating time and space, she also skews predominant conceptions and conventions of narration and bodily presence to positive effect. The dialogue of *Récit d'A* relies mainly on extracts of the testimony that Andrew created in conversation with Valiquette. These extracts are punctuated with, and connected by, occasional philosophical and poetic musings provided by Valiquette; she thus becomes the film's guiding narrator, with Andrew taking the role of her narratee. The serene qualities of Valiquette's omniscient voice reinforce the overarching reflective mood of the film. In a manner not dissimilar to Dr Peter in *The Broadcast Tapes of Dr Peter*, she narrates with a controlled and rational sense of thoughtfulness and reassurance, with her voice acting as a source of explanation and credible authority, providing the captions to the images of HIV/AIDS that had been propelled into society's consciousness without proper explanation. Like Valiquette, Andrew comes across as friendly, light-hearted and warm in nature. His voice is endearing and, unlike Valiquette, he often laughs. The likeability of Andrew as conveyed by his voice increases the viewer's receptiveness to his words. It is significant that *Récit d'A* does not feature a single person talking on-screen. By choosing to keep her body hidden, Valiquette demonstrates the self-empowerment that PLWHAs can realise through refusing to expose their bodies to societal scrutiny.⁷⁵ The invisibility of Andrew and Valiquette also obliges the viewer to pay absolute attention to their voices and to the poignancy and impact of the feelings they express. This means that, even as a film, *Récit d'A* remains strongly focussed on the production of speech that lies at the heart of testimony. It is also significant that neither voice explicitly mentions anything concerned with their sexuality or how they came to be HIV-positive. By leaving vague their sexuality and the ways in which they contracted HIV, Andrew and Valiquette counteract the dominant culture that obliged PLWHAs to confess and explain the source of their condition. Valiquette's film is not the only renowned HIV/AIDS-related testimonial film to play with conventions of bodily presence. In 1993, Derek Jarman created *Blue*, a seventy-minute film in which he exclusively muses over a monochromatic blue screen. Produced as Jarman was going blind from

⁷⁵ Throughout *Récit d'A*, Valiquette is seen only once on-screen, saving her appearance until the very end of the film; the significance of this will be discussed later.

CMV, the film questions the role played by sight and visual perception in our experiences and understandings of HIV/AIDS. Jarman's voiceover, combined with the total absence of his physical presence on screen and the film's highly subjective and surreal viewpoint, transforms the camera into the eyes through which he sees the world around him. By removing all traces of corporeality from his reflection on his life, Jarman obliges the viewer to become the PLWHA, thus greatly heightening the sensorial and emotional impact of his reflections.⁷⁶ Valiquette's principally first-person perspective on the world as expressed through *Récit d'A* similarly obliges the viewer to embody and thus become a PLWHA, offering recognisable, 'real-world' scenes blended with more symbolically-charged footage that, when combined, take the viewer on a figurative and metaphysical voyage.

Andrew's emotional journey

It is against this backdrop of affirmative non-conformism that Valiquette presents the experience of living with HIV/AIDS as one that is shared rather than solitary. Andrew's journey can be divided into five emotional 'acts': shock, denial, erasure, sadness and determination. These five 'acts', conveyed by Andrew's dialogue and the imagery on which his words elaborate, give the viewer a vivid and effective insight into the mind and emotions of a PLWHA. The first 'act', shock, becomes evident as Andrew discusses light-heartedly with Valiquette how he came to realise his HIV-positive status. This dialogue is laid over footage taken by Valiquette hanging from the side of a San Francisco cable car, recording the car's vertiginous progress up the steep street. Research indicates that the car is heading south to north on the Powell/Hyde line between the streets of Albert and Lombard. The juxtaposition of Andrew's words with the street scene footage conveys the ability of HIV to disrupt the normality of life. The cable-car ride, a typical San Franciscan scene and tourist attraction, seems incongruous with the seriousness of the news being recounted by Andrew. This incongruity embodies a PLWHA's initial disbelief at being diagnosed as HIV-positive, and the way in which a diagnosis (and thus the threat of imminent or premature death) can

⁷⁶ 'The body of the witness that has disappeared from the screen returns through the corporeal experience of the spectator [...] *Blue* uses the relations between visual and oral perception to implicate the body of its spectator in the act of bearing witness to AIDS' (Hallas, 2009: 219).

seemingly emerge out of nowhere. Valiquette's manipulation of the footage and the audio track reinforce the scene's status as a distant memory being recounted by Andrew. The remarkably high contrast of the film's colours distorts the view up the hill, rendering certain details of the street scene blurred and indiscernible. The oversaturation of the scene's colours is also reminiscent of holiday photographs and vintage postcards, further positing the moment as a memory from Andrew's past. Combined with the first-person perspective of the cable car ride, Andrew's narration obliges the viewer to witness and feel the stomach-dropping sense of shock felt he feels facing his diagnosis.

The second stage of Andrew's emotional journey, denial, is articulated through a series of very different tableaux that reflect the vulnerability of the human body to collapse. This sequence is the first of several to feature surreal visual material that Valiquette created outside of the context of her Californian trip that symbolises the emotions that lie behind Andrew's words. In the years before effective AIDS treatments emerged, many PLWHAs resorted to vitamins and herbal remedies in a vain attempt to stave off their illness. Andrew jokingly speaks to Valiquette about the extensive vitamin regime that quickly came to dictate his daily routine. As he speaks, a naked man is seen lying on the floor in a variety of corpse-like positions within a bright, white space. The camera provides the viewer with a close-up of the man's hand that is seen stroking and grasping at the white floor. The disconcertingly otherworldly imagery can be read as a metaphor for the desperation that underlies Andrew's joviality, the vulnerable, naked body symbolising the precarity of his corporeal existence and his fading away towards death. The grasping hand is illustrative of a PLWHA's helplessness and fear of an early and miserable demise, and the strong desire to avoid such a fate. The white space voids the body of any context, crystallising the feelings of confusion and meaninglessness experienced in the wake of a diagnosis. Valiquette narrates her film in a voice that is profoundly expressive and moving. As the naked man is depicted lying on the ground in the white space, Valiquette displays and reads aloud a trio of poetic extracts. The first reads as follows:

Tu aimeras,
comme ils furent haïs,
au cœur débattu

de la blancheur.

Edmond Jabès [sic]

This extract fades out, to be replaced by another:

Que tout soit blanc
afin que tout soit naissance.

This extract too fades away. The camera pans up away from the body into empty white space. A final extract materialises:

Blanc, le murmure
Blanc, le pétale
Blanc, le départ
Blanche, la rature

As indicated on screen, these extracts of poetry are taken from the work of Edmond Jabès, an Egyptian Jewish poet writing in French, whose work reflects on life, loss and meaning in a post-Holocaust world. Valiquette's use of these extracts, taken from his work *Le livre des marges*, can be interpreted in a variety of ways. She may have identified with Jabès as an artist reflecting upon life as a marginalised person (a poet and Jew in exile), just as *Récit d'A* contextualises the suffering of PLWHAs within the broader, global theme of injustice. Jabès's insistent expressions of whiteness resonate with the blinding whiteness of the naked man seen on screen. Read in the context of the first extract, the man symbolises a troubling idea of purity, associating disease and death with cleansing. This interpretation is complemented by the second extract which associates whiteness and death with rebirth. The final extract strongly re-associates whiteness with mortality, with Jabès's choice of words seeming remarkably funereal in tone, equating whiteness with the fading of life force, death and effacement. The state of whiteness is thus presented as an ambiguous and unstable point of rupture at which life begins and ends, so that the naked man depicted by Valiquette becomes a symbol of both the fragility of life and certainty

of death. The delicacy of the words as also captured by Jabès in the shortness of the lines and the minimalist vocabulary is articulated and stabilised by the precise cadences of Valiquette's serene musical voice. Chapter One outlined the relevance of Kristeva's analysis of the abject, a decompositional process that represents the nauseating site of the transition from individual being to inchoate matter, to the perception of PLWHAs and the revulsion with which they were met (Kristeva, 1980: 9-12). Of all the films to be studied in this thesis, only *Récit d'A* depicts and interrogates the abject position held by PLWHAs who simultaneously, and so troublingly, incarnate life and death. Whilst two of the documentaries studied in Chapter Two, *Mortel désir* and *Médecins de cœur*, both squarely confronted the mortality of HIV, it is only *Récit d'A* that, through the study of symbolism, poetry and colour as conveyed by the 'white man' sequence, captures an essence of a PLWHA's situation, surviving on the edges of both existence *and* non-existence.

The synergies between the sequence's layered exploration of whiteness and that of colours and their inherent moods as observed in Derek Jarman's *Chroma* are further suggestive of the commonality in both artists' approaches to expressively and sensorially reflecting on HIV. The recurring application of colours suggests their ability to convey the essence and physiological impact of profound, complex and conflicting emotions, whilst the specific recurrence of whiteness, an absence of all colour, underscores its potential to embody feelings of dissolution, sorrow and death. In the following scenes, Valiquette uses a contrasting multi-coloured palette to give tone and depth to Andrew's words and the spirit of the feelings they describe.

The third stage of erasure is conveyed by another dramatic shift in imagery. Andrew maintains his joviality and informs Valiquette that, in spite of the vitamins that he had been taking, he eventually acquired all of the symptoms of pneumocystis, leading to his hospitalisation. However, the imagery of the scene undercuts his narrative, further suggesting the feelings that lie beneath his façade of bravery. The shot of the man on the floor cuts to a series of Positron Emission Tomography (PET) scan images that fill and dominate the entire screen. A PET scanner is a form of 3D-modelling software that enables non-intrusive bodily examination, particularly in the detection of tumours and metastases. The

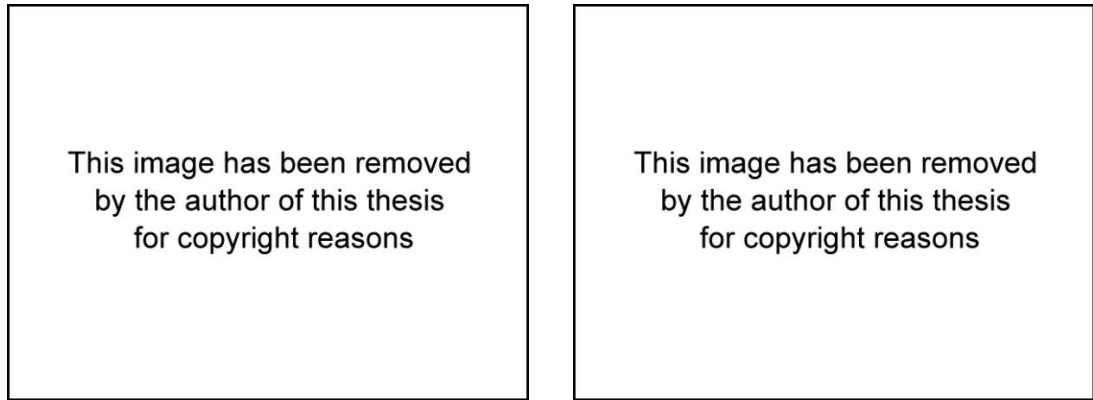


Illustration 6

scanner produces vivid, multi-coloured images that depict cross-sections of the human body, with the colours reflecting different densities. The vibrancy of the images jars greatly with the implicit meaning and seriousness of the scan, creating a sense of confusion and unease. The disappearance of the man's body and the total invasion of the screen by the bright PET scan images suggest that both the male figure and Andrew have given themselves up to the total medical abstraction of an HIV-positive diagnosis (illustration 6). An irritating humming sound and the beeping of a heart rate monitor are the only sounds heard at this moment. The noises are cold, industrial and man-made, reinforcing the interpretation of medical science as a sterile system of machinery indifferent to human emotions and experience. In relation to Foucault's conception of the healthcare profession as a mechanism for societal surveillance, Valiquette's treatment of medical science is nuanced. She does not directly equate doctors to agents of control. However, the processing of the man's body into a series of organised coloured blocks does evoke Foucault's characterisation of the profession as one that prioritises the dissection and identification of the illness for the sake of order and control over the broader wellbeing of the patient.⁷⁷ The juxtaposition of the PET imagery with Andrew's narration portrays medical science as inhuman and alienating, thus suggesting her belief in the need to approach HIV with compassion as well as hard science.

The fourth stage of emotion to be conveyed by Andrew is sadness. Having overcome the shock of his diagnosis, he realises the futility of denial and the threat to the integrity of the self posed by HIV and proceeds to confront what his

⁷⁷ See Chapter One, pp.12-13.

diagnosis signifies. The imagery seen during this 'act' uses footage that Valiquette shot in the desert of Death Valley, a location she employs as a visual motif throughout *Récit d'A*. The tone of the voiceover provided by Andrew is now markedly different. Having grown accustomed to the cheery nature of his voice, viewers are shaken out of their comfort by his sudden lurch towards melancholy. After joking with Valiquette about the bewildering number of pills that he has to take on a daily basis in order to keep his illness at bay, Andrew's account moves to the theme of death, and to the overwhelming presence of mortality with which he now lives. The sequence climaxes with Valiquette asking Andrew how many friends he had lost to AIDS; his reply makes painfully clear the overwhelming scale of his experience with death.⁷⁸ His words, expressed with great solemnity, demonstrate the enormity and senselessness of the loss caused by HIV. His feelings of indescribable sadness are ingeniously explained and exemplified by Valiquette's manipulation of the desert footage. She uses wide-angle zoom shots to make abstract images of the desert landscape; ripples in the sand dunes are visible, but once stripped of context they become humanesque fingerprints and folds of skin. She also lays blue and purple filters over the footage to further distort the desert scene, rendering the ordinarily scorching landscape cold, biting and desolate. Editing gives the sequence further eerie qualities. Different shots of the desert fade into each other, conveying the amorphous nature of Andrew's sadness and his severe malaise. These scenes are intercut with close-up shots that pan over the face and body of a man on the floor, previously seen in the white space, but now coloured blue and purple. Both the contrast and brightness of the footage has been ramped up, blurring the recognisable contours and boundaries of the man's body. Thanks to the fading transitions and the slow pan of the camera over both desert and man, the two appear to blend seamlessly into one another; they are one and the same, both submerged and floating, figuring a surreal place that is familiar yet filled with foreboding. By marrying Andrew's sombre dialogue with the carefully crafted images of the desert and the figure of a man that have been voided of all meaning, Valiquette translates emotion into filmic form, providing a visual representation of Andrew's feelings and also

⁷⁸ 'How many? Fifty, sixty, seventy? I've easily lost count. I've lost count. I know that may sound terrible but I don't know how I could remember.'

reflecting Valiquette's relationship with Death Valley as an appropriate metaphor for the 'desertification' of PLWHAs as brought about by AIDS.

The final 'act' of *Récit d'A* imparts a strong sense of optimism and determination, with both words and images forming a defiant and inspiring crescendo to the film. Having confronted his sadness in the previous 'act', Andrew moves on to discuss how he has learnt to live with HIV and to maintain a vital sense of self-worth. He begins by summarising how his experience as a PLWHA signifies an intense compression of all that life and the world can offer, both good and bad.⁷⁹ These comments hint at the strength Andrew has found and used to see beyond the sadness and fear inspired by HIV towards the more positive aspects of his new life situation. As he speaks, Valiquette uses a different kind of desert imagery, footage of the sun rising over the Grand Canyon, to symbolise his feelings. She captured this footage on a detour she took from Death Valley into Arizona during the filming of *Récit d'A*. It has been speeded up, allowing the sunrise to steadily fill the dark and empty canyon with light and warm, ever-shifting pastel shades of pink, orange, yellow and grey. The stillness of the frame and the vivacity of colours that contrast strongly with the bleak palette of the previous desert scene, present the landscape as a living, impressionist painting. The colours of the sunrise signify Andrew's stepping out of a physical and an emotional darkness towards a mental space where he may find a sense of conclusion, positivity and clarity. The simplicity of the moment stands in contrast to the chilling and ominous rendering of the desert as seen in the previous 'act'. A swelling and markedly optimistic soundtrack has been added in the form of synthesisers that provide a constant and shifting note and that mirrors and reinforces the movement and fluidity of the sunrise on-screen. The speed of the sunrise, coupled with Andrew's 'life accelerated' comments, convey the urgency with which PLWHAs necessarily live. However, this urgency is harnessed positively as a means of prioritising the important aspects of life and living with an affirmative sense of present-ness, a sentiment echoed further by Andrew's musings.⁸⁰ On his last word, the sunrise is complete and daylight has fully flooded

⁷⁹ 'What I have gone through in the last seven years is easily a full lifetime; I've gone through... everything. It's been, for me, life accelerated, with everything possible happening.'

⁸⁰ 'I felt myself having a need to explore other areas and look at life in a more spiritual way... I worked more on the getting rid of old hurts, getting rid of old... pains, and learning to love myself.'

the canyon. The interplay between visual imagery and narrative voice suggests that suffering can be partially overcome by the discovery of courage, the assertion of personal agency and an appreciation of the self. In *The Gazette*, Valiquette expresses her affinity with the writing of Edmond Jabès and specifically his depictions of deserts as empty canvases upon which humankind has the opportunity and freedom to make its mark.⁸¹ Valiquette's will to see the positive that exists in negative situations, as reinforced by her admiration for Jabès's portrayal of deserts, is reflected in her own two markedly different depictions of desert scenes, whose polarity symbolises the extent to which one's attitude dictates the significations of HIV. At the end of this sequence, the viewer is taken back to the Powell/Hyde cable car, a location not seen since the beginning of the film. In conversation with Valiquette, Andrew chirpily discusses the signification (or lack thereof) of his living as a PLWHA in a permanent state of limbo.⁸² Their dialogue highlights the futility of asking unanswerable questions. Andrew goes on to discuss how he stays active by working on the San Francisco AIDS Board. Difficult situations, so it seems, can be better confronted through communal action rather than excessive introspection. As Andrew pauses to think, so too does the cable car as it picks up passengers at the intersection of Hyde and Chestnut. Below the intersection lies Russian Hill, careering down for as far as the eye can see to San Francisco Bay. The horizon is indistinguishable, whilst the road lined with cars and low buildings drags the eye down into the void. The cable car has become the metaphorical rollercoaster on which Andrew and his HIV-positive status find themselves. The first cable car sequence filmed the car struggling up a section of Hyde that was edged by tall buildings, casting a shadow and adding to the impression of being trapped in a tunnel. Having traversed the desert and succeeded in overcoming the initial trauma of HIV, Andrew now finds himself on top of the world (or at the very least the top of San Francisco), ready and poised to dive into the life that lies below, regardless of what that life may be.

The final moments of the film further underscore the communal nature of Valiquette's journey. As Andrew discusses his belief in the positivity of life, the

⁸¹ 'At that time, I was reading Edmond Jabès [...] He writes about the desert as the beginning of the universe – a blank page [...] Man makes his track in the desert – a passage through the universe, through time. I built freely on those images' (Shatenstein, 1993).

⁸² 'Andrew: 'I know what you're gonna ask me, I don't know! Why am I still around? (laughs) I don't know.' Esther: 'Is it just destiny?' Andrew: (pause) 'I don't know... there is no answer.'

camera cuts back to Death Valley, with panning shots that fade into each other depicting the desert as a vast yet warm place. These contrast strongly with previous depictions of the landscape as cold and forbidding, and resonate greatly with the depictions of deserts as spaces of infinite opportunity as created by Edmond Jabès, whom Valiquette held in great admiration. As Andrew's narration ends, Valiquette steps out from behind the camera and walks out into the desert. The functions of this move are twofold. Having worked through her emotional journey both with and through Andrew, the moment can be read as the filmmaker's realisation of self-empowerment, with Valiquette now ready to positively face her status and future, whatever it may entail, as represented by the desert landscape. Her moving out from behind the camera also serves to highlight the shared ownership of the journey, reminding the viewer of her presence as the creator and instigator of the journey to which her audience has born witness through her camera and thus through her eyes; the journey is simultaneously hers to own and everyone's to appreciate.

***Le Singe bleu* (Esther Valiquette, 1992)**

In Valiquette's second testimonial film, *Le Singe bleu*, the filmmaker travels to the Greek islands of Crete and Santorini to explore the physical remains of the Minoan civilisation. Whilst *Récit d'A* was produced independently by Valiquette with the assistance of Vidéographe, a prominent and fertile Montréal-based artist-led film production, distribution and support centre, *Le Singe bleu* was produced with the support of the NFB. The film garnered considerable attention and praise upon its release, beating sixty other entries to win the Prix Normande-Juneau for Best Short Film at the 1992 Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois. The film also gained recognition in Anglophone Canada, winning Best Short Documentary at the 1993 Genie Awards in Toronto. *Le Singe bleu* shares a number of similarities with *Récit d'A*; by embarking on a journey and documenting her travels, Valiquette creates a framework in which she can use a series of poignant and affecting metaphors to give form to the emotions related to her HIV-positive status and thus share her experiences as a PLWHA. Her second film constitutes however a more philosophical reflection on HIV/AIDS that examines the broader status of the virus in relation to a global history of catastrophic events. Whereas

Récit d'A demonstrated the journeys and experiences shared by the PLWHA community, *Le Singe bleu* concerns itself with traumatic crisis, regardless of time, place and cause, as an event to which all communities are potentially exposed.

HIV/AIDS: a shared tragedy

As was the case in *Récit d'A*, the journey undertaken by Valiquette is symbolic on a number of different levels. Her crossing the globe to Greece allows her to embark on a staged process of vocalisation and discovery that affords a sense of progress, improvement and distance from the initial moment of trauma that constructs the journey as a metaphor for escape. The destinations of Crete and Santorini also hold a similar symbolic power to that of San Francisco in *Récit d'A*. In the second millennium BC, both Santorini and Crete were devastated by the Thera eruption, an enormous volcanic event that choked the Minoan cities and their inhabitants under a blanket of thick ash and toxic smoke. The eruption, one of the largest ever known, produced enough volcanic debris to depress the earth's crust, drowning parts of Santorini along with its civilisation and people. Valiquette's journey to Greece to see the remains of this catastrophic event replicates the need to visit sites of trauma, both physical and symbolic, in order to confront the power of uncontrollable forces and to understand and appreciate the significance and magnitude of such sites in relation to human experience. The symbolic significance of the Minoan disaster is clear when considered in the context of the AIDS crisis, another event of sudden apocalyptic proportions that decimated communities across the world by causing a gruesome and often rapid form of death. The journey undertaken by Valiquette to Crete and Santorini thus enables her to further explore aspects of the demise of the Minoan civilisation and to engage with its surviving artefacts and the ways in which they mirror a range of contemporary questions and emotions connected to the AIDS crisis.

In a similar fashion to *Récit d'A*, the film plays with predominant conceptions of time, space and voice as a means of creating a dreamlike and often surreal world in which the full impact of Valiquette's chosen metaphors can come to the fore. She reprises the role of the narrator, never appearing on screen yet consistently asserting her presence through the serene intonations of her clear and controlled voice. The majority of the film's action occurs on location in

Greece, with Valiquette capturing and narrating her perambulations around the ruins of the Minoan civilisation from a first-person perspective not dissimilar from that used in *Récit d'A*. However, this footage is often intercut with flashes of secondary material that necessarily imply leaps in time, location and even genre. In particular, her wanderings are intercalated with footage shot within the distinctly sterile space of a modern hospital room. During these scenes, the camera films the space subjectively from the perspective of a bed-bound patient. A close-up of signage in French giving instructions on how to safely handle bodily fluids implies that the hospital room is in Francophone Canada, and that the patient has HIV/AIDS. This room is featured on three occasions. On the first occasion, the camera captures the actions of anonymous doctors by using close-ups of white gloved hands filling an IV bag and disposing of a used needle. The sequence finishes by showing the bed, now empty, from a position in the middle of the room, suggesting that the patient has left the bed. On the second occasion, the camera (and therefore the patient) is back in bed, looking out across the room. There are flowers on the chest of drawers, and newspapers on the bedside table, thus cueing the viewer to recognise the passage of time. On the third occasion, the relevance of the hospital room becomes clear. The position of the camera has shifted permanently to the middle of the room, affording the audience a view of the now-empty bed. The camera's gaze falls upon a pile of books, including such titles as *Le monde de la Grèce* and *Crète au temps de Minos*. This moment heavily insinuates that the scenes situated in Greece are in fact being seen in the mind of the patient and thus suggests that the bed-bound individual has employed imagination as a means of coping with both their declining health and the repressive realities of the hospital environment. In a similar fashion to *Récit d'A*, Valiquette employs a first-person perspective as a means of placing the audience in her shoes; *Le Singe bleu* however takes subjectivity one step further. During the hospital scenes, Valiquette's narration directly addresses the audience, leaving them little choice but to adopt the role of the PLWHA.⁸³ Valiquette's *tutoiement* can also be interpreted as a form of self-address, with her narration of

⁸³ 'Et l'accident t'a précipité toi aussi, dans un lieu que tu ne connaissais pas. Sous l'orage de cette fin de siècle. Tu t'es réveillé dans un cubicule blanc, ce silence tout à coup, et la stupeur. Ce mot qui résonne encore, presque irréel, cette maladie qui n'arrive qu'aux autres, sida. Ces gens qui t'ont approché avec des gants, et tu as commencé à y croire.'

the events which she herself endured in hospital rendering the scene an out-of-body-experience. In either case, the combination of the first-person perspective with her use of *tu* ensures that the viewpoints and roles assumed by herself and the audience remain in constant flux. In contrast to the often vivid colours of the Greek islands, each appearance of the hospital room is filmed in black and white. This visual difference underscores the hospital as a cold place of alienation that is indifferent to the emotional needs of its patients, further suggesting Valiquette's belief in the need for a balanced approach to confronting AIDS that is not based solely upon a soulless medical treatment. This revelation, which is saved to the very end of the film, renders *Le Singe bleu* a mise-en-abyme of the notion of journey, transforming Valiquette's actual journey to Greece into one shared by all those seeking to escape the trauma of HIV/AIDS.

Having established the collapse of the Minoan civilisation as an allegory for those communities adversely affected by HIV/AIDS, Valiquette sets about clarifying and commenting upon the precise nature of this relationship. In one particular sequence, she depicts the ruins of the village at Phaistos in Crete. A hand-held camera films the village from the perspective of a person wandering in and out of the ruins. The camera mimics the human eye, lingering and panning over old stone washbasins, the courtyard, and miscellaneous stones found on the floor of the rooms. The soundtrack, however, brings the ruins to life. As the camera examines the artefacts, the everyday sounds of laughing children, running water, stones being hammered, pipe music, goats bleating and animal bells tinkling can be heard, evoking a contented society whose innocence and gaiety was abruptly destroyed by the Thera eruption. Later, at the famous covered excavation site of Akrotiri on the island of Santorini, Valiquette films frescos that miraculously survived the eruption and the passage of time. The camera pans over the diverse range of paintings in a series of close-ups; depictions include blue monkeys, antelopes, people engaged in boxing, a fisherman, birds and flowers. The movement of the camera, teamed with a loud and repetitive soundtrack of people chanting, animates the still images and underscores the great sophistication of Minoan civilisation. This remarkably long sequence filled with colour and sound cuts abruptly to another part of the Akrotiri excavation site. The camera finds itself surrounded by the remains of ancient buildings that have been unearthed from the ash and protected from the elements

by a warehouse-like roof. The music has stopped and the atmosphere of the site is sombre, quiet and claustrophobic, with only the creaking of the metal roof to be heard. The abrupt and dramatic cut between the two locations underscores the enormity of the damage wreaked by the Thera eruption, reducing a fully-fledged society to ruins in the blink of an eye. The overall impression created by Valiquette is one of a civilisation whose members were unfairly robbed of their lives and utterly oblivious to the impending catastrophe that they were about to suffer. This experience, it is implied, resonates greatly with that of AIDS, an illness whose arrival into the world was similarly abrupt, unexpected and devastating.

The juxtaposition of Valiquette's wanderings with two other sequences, ones that convey the invasive nature of HIV with great imagination and creativity, further strengthens the position of the Thera eruption as an effective and revealing allegory for HIV. On both occasions, the camera seems to be floating in what appears to be the bloodstream of the human body. The camera focusses upon a small, spiked floating object that resembles a burr. Valiquette's narration of the sequence informs us that the burr-like object is in fact HIV making its way through the human body.⁸⁴ Her characteristically gentle and musical voice and matter-of-fact description lend the sequence a documentary feel that emphasises the chilling ruthlessness of the HIV virus. The virus passes rapidly and repeatedly across the screen and is seen embedding itself into a fleshy, spongy and flaky material. Blood cells are also depicted racing through what appear to be the body's arteries, while what could be interpreted as capillaries are seen writhing around in a sea of pink, translucent globules. Bursts of colour erupt and flood through the viscous space, seeping into every crevice. An audio track featuring an undulating, vibrating and grating sound can be heard throughout the sequence, creating a strikingly threatening and unpleasant sequence of alien and terrifying images. The realistic qualities of these images of the body are both bewildering and impossible. On his Youtube page, François Aubry, the head of animation for the film according to the credits, gives an insight into how the 'body' was filmed:

⁸⁴ 'Il efface, transgresse, substitue le code originel, millénaire, il prend contrôle du mécanisme de défense et le détourne à son avantage, en vue de sa propre reproduction.'

Effects of this movie where [sic] shot using models that where [sic] manipulated live into aquariums, giant veins sculpted in latex molds [sic], cells molded [sic] with plastic on plexiglass shels [sic], blood cells flowing was [sic] lentils painted with Chevrolet red on one side so they would change from brown to red while falling down in liquid. All visuals where [sic] shot in super-35mm (Mitchel with Fries motor). Art was shot using 35 mm Oxberry rostrum and optical camera stands. (Aubry, 2010)

Aubry's description conveys Valiquette's dedication to the idea of taking the viewer on a journey into the human body. By combining artistic craftsmanship with the kinetic potential of the medium of film, the sequence vividly and chillingly underscores the *modus operandi* of HIV and the ease with which it can infiltrate the bloodstream. The intercutting of the bloodstream sequences with footage shot of an exploding volcano draws a strong parallel between the Minoan social body and the human body, entities that were, and are, both ultimately defenceless against the power of external forces. The viscous qualities of Aubry's animation, reminiscent of the analysis of bodily collapse in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, are also horrifyingly evocative of the fluidity of the ash cloud and lava that would have washed over and engulfed the lives of the Minoans with deadly effect.

Symbols of trauma: the blue monkey and the Phaistos Disc

As suggested by the title of the film, the blue monkey is a significant symbol within *Le Singe bleu*, offering further commentary on Valiquette's contemplation of HIV, her status as a PLWHA and her position within the AIDS crisis. Her fascination with the creature, a prominent icon within Minoan culture, becomes evident in the film's two fresco sequences. The first depicts Valiquette's initial encounter with the blue monkey, with the referential meaning of the animal established by her narration.⁸⁵ The sequence employs close-up shots that both pan and hover over different depictions of these monkeys, whilst the music chosen by Valiquette

⁸⁵ 'Toujours ces singes bleus qui reviennent dans plusieurs décors, des êtres mystérieux, des têtes hirsutes sur des corps presque humains, et pourtant différents. Personnages inusités, présences incongrues qui ont un je-ne-sais-quoi de dérangent. Ils ne sont pas comme nous, ce sont les autres.'

consists of a harp playing undulating scales, adding to the pensive and mysterious mood of the sequence. The music and camera movements of the second fresco sequence bear a striking resemblance to those of the first, and between the two, Valiquette asks rhetorically whether those who were depicted in the paintings were aware of the impending disaster that would befall them. Valiquette's narration gives the monkeys their symptomatic meaning.⁸⁶ As Valiquette pauses, the camera zooms slowly into one of the faces of the monkeys until the screen is filled solely with the primate's physiognomy, at which point she resumes her narration.⁸⁷ The monkey can be interpreted as being symbolic of the abject, a feeling of haunting malaise that stems, according to Kristevan analysis, from seeing an element of the mortal and dying self in the face of the other.⁸⁸ Valiquette's fascination with the animals, creatures that long since perished in the Thera eruption but that remain forever trapped in the palace paintings as if awaiting their death, stems from the disturbing affinity that she feels towards them. The recognition of herself, a PLWHA, in the eyes of the blue monkey, a liminal being persecuted by fate, proves to be both chilling and mystifying. In her 1993 interview in *The Gazette*, she explains how the encounter with the blue monkey obliged her to confront the feelings of otherness and estrangement inspired in her by her HIV-positive diagnosis:

[Encountering the blue monkey] was like a revelation at the end of a labyrinth. The whole iconography of the period was done on profile, but the blue monkey faces you. I needed that image because it represented the meeting with 'altérité' – otherness. The whole time, in the film, I talk about you, about the sickness of others. The other now

⁸⁶ 'Ce malaise qui m'effleure, c'est l'inconfort que nous ressentons tous devant les êtres menacés par la mort. Qui nous renvoie forcément à un autre. Ce malaise, c'est un destin troublant, pour lequel hélas je ne pus rien.'

⁸⁷ 'Tu me regardes. Toi, l'insulaire, l'étranger. Toi, l'autre. C'est ma propre image que tu me renvoies dans ce regard. C'est ma détresse que j'ai lu au fond de tes yeux. Toi, c'est l'autre que je suis devenue, celle qu'on a isolée, retranchée, qu'on met en quarantaine, qu'on ne touche plus.'

⁸⁸ 'Surgissement massif et abrupt d'une étrangeté qui, si elle a pu m'être familière dans une vie opaque et oubliée, me harcèle maintenant comme radicalement séparée, répugnante. Pas moi. Pas ça. Mais pas rien non plus. Un « quelque chose » que je ne reconnais pas comme chose' (Kristeva, 1980: 10).

is myself. I am in the camp of the sick people. I am the one who has been isolated and quarantined. (Shatenstein, 1993)

Valiquette's encounter with the blue monkey is portrayed neither as a positive experience nor as a negative one. Her narration of the scene is matter-of-fact, underlining the significance that she attributes to these creatures and suggesting a certain resignation to her life situation. Her tone in both the film and in interview, however, also suggests that such a sobering and potentially distressing confrontation with her situation is necessary to develop an improved mental relationship with her status as a PLWHA.

The Phaistos Disc is another relic of Minoan civilisation to which Valiquette returns in *Le Singe bleu*. The disc, which was unearthed by an Italian archaeologist in Phaistos Palace in 1908, became one of the greatest mysteries of the twentieth century. Believed to date from the Minoan Bronze Age, it is made of clay, measures around 15cm in diameter and features 241 imprinted symbols on both of its sides, arranged in a spiral emanating from its centre. Valiquette's repeated use of the artefact suggests her belief in its significance in the context of the AIDS crisis. On its first appearance, the disc is seen encased in a glass box in a pitch-black room, illuminated by a single spotlight. As the camera gradually moves closer towards it, she introduces the artefact and begins to discuss its significance.⁸⁹ As Valiquette finishes, the disc leaps out at the viewer and begins to turn anti-clockwise against the direction of its spiral (illustration 7). Throughout the sequence, a bouzouki plays a lithe tune that ascends and descends scales in a minor key. The urgent and spiralling nature of the music heightens the sense of anxiety and mimics the disconcerting description of the disc that Valiquette provides. It epitomises what she perceives to be the twentieth-century obsession with the need to decipher and explain and thus control the world and its mysteries, an obsession doomed to remain fruitless.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ 'L'énigme du disque de Phaistos ne sera peut-être jamais résolue. A la fois étranges et familières, les figures empruntées au quotidien, circulent dans une spirale rythmée, suggèrent un refrain ou un calendrier. Rappellent le retour des événements et leur brève apparition dans le temps. Ainsi, les choses et les êtres sont happés dans le même chemin, vers un centre inconnu et insaisissable. Toi aussi, tu es entraîné dans la course du temps, et tu sais désormais que les certitudes closes ne sont pas la garantie de l'immobilité.'

⁹⁰ 'Life meets many terrible accidents [but] they're just life stories, all happening at the same time, and they meet. They cross paths. A human being doesn't control everything. He's caught in the whole movement of the universe' (Shatenstein, 1993).

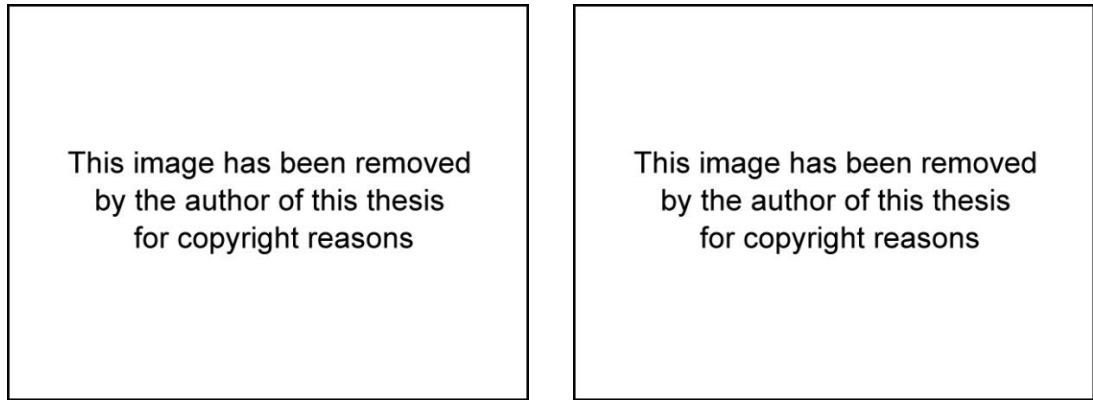


Illustration 7

This reading is bolstered by a previous montage of archival footage of archaeologists investigating the Minoan ruins in the early twentieth century. The montage depicts many hands attempting to put together a shattered stone tablet engraved with Greek text. Framing lends the tablet the air of an unfinished jigsaw. The hands reach in and out from the extremities of the frame to gesticulate at each other, suggesting disagreement between the archaeologists. The arguing hands and the visual similarities between the tablet and a child's puzzle cast the archaeologists as bickering individuals who cannot agree upon how best to rebuild fragments of the past. Valiquette's narration of the sequence suggests that the archaeologists are engaged in a pointless and self-defeating task and that their actions are symptomatic of the modern world's obsessive and misguided attempt to define and control the past, present and future of human history.⁹¹ In contrast, the Phaistos Disc symbolises what Valiquette perceives to be the utterly arbitrary nature of life and the impossibility of exerting control over external forces. Her narration of the scene suggests that humanity is destined to move through life, forever spiralling like the disc towards an uncertain future influenced by the higher forces of time and chance. Like the blue monkey, the disc is a further example of *sub specie aeternitatis* that embodies the inability of humankind to foresee what lies ahead and to control and decipher arbitrary happenings.

Considered in the light of the AIDS crisis, the symbolic values of the collapse of Minoan civilisation, the blue monkey and the Phaistos Disc initially

⁹¹ 'Le vingtième siècle s'acharne à recoller les morceaux, pour recréer le grand livre. Une humanité qui cherche à se définir, à s'inscrire dans une continuité. La civilisation minoenne aura stimulé l'imagination des écrivains et des archéologues en quête de paradis perdu.'

come across as broadly melancholic, with all three metaphors strongly indicative of Valiquette's sense of hopelessness and isolation in the face of destruction and death. Such an interpretation is echoed by the sequence in which she films the walk she takes around the Thera volcano. Peering into craters and wandering over mounds of scree to film heaps of smouldering rock, she captures a scene of eerie stillness. The only noises are the wind, the tumbling of stones under her feet, and the sounds of panpipes occasionally streaking the atmosphere with seemingly random notes. Her narration of the scene further implies the futility, brevity and relative insignificance of human experience on earth.⁹² An initial comparison between Valiquette's two testimonial films could conclude that *Le Singe bleu* is markedly less affirmative than *Récit d'A*. Whilst Andrew was able to achieve a sense of closure and victory over his condition, *Le Singe bleu* sees Valiquette trapped in a spiral of uncertainty, isolation and desolation. However, such a conclusion ignores the implicit meaning of her metaphors, symbols and analogies when considered in the context of her experiences as a PLWHA. In this light, the film can be read as a broader consideration of the values and meanings of trace and time. Her journey to Crete and Santorini and ensuing investigation of the Minoan ruins demonstrate that, however great the catastrophe, its wounds will largely heal and fade from both the landscape and the collective consciousness, until only the most fragmentary of vestiges remain. In the context of the AIDS crisis, this long-term interpretation can ultimately give some solace to those people and communities implicated in the crisis.⁹³ Through its use of the

⁹² 'À l'échelle du temps géologique, deux mille ans ce n'est rien. A peine un souffle, un frisson, un éternuement de volcan. C'est pourtant dans cette petite fraction du temps que s'était dé faite toute une civilisation de vie humaine, une civilisation balayée [...] Ce qui reste de Santorin aujourd'hui, c'est un cratère encore fumant, dans l'eau, une odeur de soufre, des pierres qui suent, chaudes.'

⁹³ This interpretation is supported by a brief moment of more factual, less lyrical, visual material that appears after Valiquette's encounter with the blue monkey. In a similar fashion to Tahani Rached in *Médecins de cœur*, Valiquette uses footage of protesters parading down Rue Sainte-Catherine in Montréal under the banner of ACT-UP Montréal. The protesters, walking in single file and holding white masks over their faces, are evocative of the statuary and frozen figures depicted elsewhere in *Le Singe bleu*, drawing parallels between those awaiting their deaths at the time of the Minoan civilisation and those in the present day. The narration provided by Valiquette in this instance ('À l'aube de l'an 2000, le vingtième siècle laisse un goût amer. Un orage passe') equates the AIDS crisis to a violent, deadly yet ultimately finite occurrence. From a historical perspective, her inclusion of the footage further documents the AIDS activism for which Montréal became well-known, as well as the importance of a ritualistic and highly visible form of protest, particularly along one of the city's main downtown thoroughfares, as a source of resilience and unity to those touched by HIV. The footage also serves as a poignant reminder of the

Minoan civilisation as a metaphor for the destruction of life, explicit depictions of HIV and intercalation of diverse visual material that ranges from the eerie to the distressing, *Le Singe bleu* acknowledges the devastation and panic that the virus can provoke. However, Valiquette ultimately interprets the AIDS crisis as but one event in a long chain of tragedies that, whilst painful, threatening and terrifying at the moment of their occurrence, will eventually be set in a new perspective by the unstoppable passage of time. Valiquette's mocking of the archaeologists in the film implies by analogy that those seeking non-existent answers to existential questions raised by the AIDS crisis are wasting time that would be better spent enjoying the present moment. This remarkably philosophical response to the AIDS crisis can be interpreted as her way of coping with her status as a PLWHA who necessarily lives in the uncertain shadow of possibly imminent death. It suggests the peace that she has made with her condition and the clarity with which she sees the world.

Valiquette's films demonstrate her desires to reach out across space and time to other suffering communities to share experience and promote understanding. The nature of the relationship between gay men and Valiquette is suggestive of the personal and societal situations of both parties. In *The Romance of Transgression in Canada*, Thomas Waugh (2006: 524) identifies Valiquette as an 'honorary queer'. This status is reflected by the programmes of the Image + Nation LGBT film festival from 1990 and 1993; *Récit d'A* featured prominently in the line-up of the former, whilst a prominent advert for *Le Singe bleu*, not as part of the festival's showcase but as part of the NFB's activities surrounding World AIDS Day on the 1st December, featured in the latter. This evidence ultimately suggests that gay men took Valiquette under their wing as 'one of their own'. Indeed, the appeal of Valiquette's films to this group is twofold. Through Andrew, *Récit d'A* directly and specifically evoke the experiences of a gay man coming to terms with his status. However, in a broader, more symbolic sense, it is the experimentations with corporeality enacted by both *Récit d'A* and *Le Singe bleu* that appealed specifically to marginalised, queer demographics who, facing stereotyping and ostracism as imposed by wider society, strongly

relevance of her imaginative, philosophical musings to the real-life situations of PLWHAs, particular those residing in Montréal.

identified with Valiquette's subversion of predominant conceptions of corporeality and defiant refusal to offer her own body for societal examination and control. From Valiquette's perspective, as a heterosexual woman, the news of her diagnosis came as a surprise that left her feeling isolated.⁹⁴ In response, she set off across the North American continent to the gay men of San Francisco in order to partake in the sense of community fostered by the city and to counteract her confinement, thus resulting in the creation of *Récit d'A*.⁹⁵ The gay community of San Francisco thus afforded Valiquette the opportunity to feel a sense of belonging and acted as a catalyst for her own journey of personal and spiritual development.

The two filmmakers studied in this chapter have used film to conduct testimonial explorations of their real-life situations as PLWHAs, implementing a productive and reflective process that allowed them to represent and negotiate the trauma of their HIV-positive status as a means of developing better relationships with themselves, their condition and the world around them. The varied emotional themes confronted by Dionne and Valiquette share affinities with those raised by authors of HIV/AIDS-related testimonial literature. *Comment vs dirais-je ?* reflects Dionne's frustration at his life situation, his fear of the unknown and his twofold desire to develop an improved rapport both with his condition and with his family in the face of an uncertain future. Valiquette's films, for their part, overwhelmingly reflect her appreciation of the gift of life and her discovery of a sense of serenity and balance that permits her to make peace with her condition. The commonality of these themes suggests that the emotions provoked by HIV/AIDS are ones that are universally experienced by PLWHAs and that will emerge consistently through testimony and testimonial texts, regardless of the medium being used to record them.

However, whilst testimonial literature and film may share thematic similarities, it is the instantaneous, face-to-face potential unique to film, as well

⁹⁴ 'I was shocked. It never, never crossed my mind that I could be HIV-positive, especially for a woman in those days [but] we now know there's no specific group anymore. [The news] hurt a lot of people' (Shatenstein, 1993).

⁹⁵ '[I] heard that some people from San Francisco had been sick for ten years and were still there to talk about it. I wanted to find out their secret. I wasn't expecting too much, like a magic mushroom, but I had to be where everything happens around AIDS' (Shatenstein, 1993).

as its ability to give striking visual form to emotions, lyrical expression and metaphors, that allows PLWHAs to build upon testimony as a speech act and fulfil their desire for self-representation. Mirroring Hallas's conception of film as an intersubjective space that catalyses ethical encounters, the three films studied in this chapter create spaces, both physical and symbolic, in which profound and important interactions between the films' creators, their immediate family and community, a broader public audience and themselves can come into existence and be mediated. The films confirm that cinema is capable of meeting the needs of PLWHAs who seek to engage with different kinds of listening figures and groups, facilitating testimony as a speech act as well as recording highly elaborate forms of reflection. Exploiting the instantaneity and mimetic potential of film, Dionne uses the video camera as a provocative instrument to incite testimony as a speech act, which then allows himself and his parents to begin to negotiate his status and new life situation. His home movie-project initially helped to create a community of listening and sharing on a familial level, whilst the release of this project as a film brought it to a larger public audience. Under the expanded guise of *La Veille électronique*, his use of the video camera generated similar communities on the streets of Montréal. Dionne's use of film allows him both to reveal his true self to his family and to defy misunderstanding and prejudice in his familial sphere, meaning that *Comment vs dirais-je ?* allows its creator to achieve both forms of self-representation. In contrast, Valiquette uses the poetic and metaphorical potential of film to construct surreal, eclectic and intertextual collages of words, images, colours and sounds that marry a philosophical and intellectual consideration of HIV to a poignant imparting of the sensorial and emotional significance of her journey as a PLWHA. Her films do not convey a strong desire on her part to make herself felt in a confrontational, political sense. Rather they seek to present HIV/AIDS symbolically as a series of shared journeys and experiences, first between PLWHAs in *Récit d'A* and then between all traumatised communities across time in *Le Singe bleu*. The interplay between voice and image evident in her corpus results in two testimonial films whose subtlety allows the viewer room to interpret and play a role in the exploration of her experiences, while her inventive deployment of a wide range of visually striking metaphors demonstrates the versatility of film as a visual medium in the constructive understanding of the meanings and implications of

HIV. Between them, the two filmmakers exploit both the documentary and imaginative potential of testimonial film to foster a varied, shared and engaging sense of solidarity equally between PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs, a sentiment that is vital to the cathartic properties of testimony and also to the capacity for individual and communal relief inherent in the genre.

Chapter Four: Feature Film

In Chapter One it has been indicated that the cinematic format of the feature film offers possibilities for imaginative and diverse depictions of the AIDS crisis that might, ideally, reach a mainstream audience.⁹⁶ This thesis has so far considered documentaries and different forms of testimonial film and their often limited target audiences. In contrast, the more popular format of the feature film, with its emphasis on fictional narratives and characters, the techniques of storytelling, dramatisation and higher production values (in terms of both visuals and soundtrack) can offer possibilities for imaginative depictions, some direct and some indirect, of the AIDS crisis. These can be directed to both to small-scale audiences with specific interests and needs, as well as large-scale audiences, thus provoking greater societal discussion and engagement with the significance of the virus.

Feature film and the AIDS crisis

In spite of their differences, both documentaries and testimonial films are genres whose reflections upon the AIDS crisis are strongly grounded in reality, thanks to their use of footage that captures real-life experiences of people confronting HIV. In contrast, feature films use footage that is expressly staged and controlled by the film's director for the purposes of entertainment. However, this is not to suggest that the reflections of the AIDS crisis conveyed by feature films are less relevant or productive than their explicitly non-fictional counterparts; on the contrary, feature films provide filmmakers with the opportunity to craft intricate worlds, storylines and characters that can contextualise and demystify the complex and disturbing phenomenon of HIV/AIDS, and render the virus less abstract and more understandable to a mass audience.

Feature film comprises a substantial variety of established sub-genres, each with their own set of prevailing themes, plot patterns, modes of communication and conventions, offering instantly recognisable cinematographic

⁹⁶ 'Feature film' is used here to designate a full-length cinematic work of narrative fiction.

contexts in which certain emotional and societal topics associated with the AIDS crisis can come accessibly to the fore. In addition, these conventions can be altered by filmmakers to surprise the viewer and shift their expectations. In *Film Art: An Introduction*, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2013: 333) assert that all fictional genre film necessarily oscillates between respecting and questioning established principles and customs to maintain the viewer's engagement. In the context of HIV/AIDS, this oscillation could provide the viewer with a reflection of the AIDS crisis that is informative, provocative and potentially unexpected. For example, the sub-genre of the thriller, one associated with noirish suspense and chilling intrigue, holds the possibility of effectively exploring some of the darker questions relating to mortality and fear as provoked by the AIDS crisis, while the romantic comedy, a sub-genre whose narratives tend to involve light-hearted mishaps and tongue-in-cheek humour, can delve into some of the impacts of the virus on the more tender issues of love, sex and intimacy.

In *The Romance of Transgression in Canada*, Thomas Waugh (2006: 280) identifies popular melodrama (described by Waugh as the 'tearjerker') as the key sub-genre of feature film consistently used across different film cultures to confront and negotiate the AIDS crisis, characterising the sub-genre as 'unashamed in its aestheticisation of suffering, its narrativisation of loss, and its elegiac solicitation of mourning'. Citing renowned examples including *Parting Glances* (Bill Sherwood, US, 1986), *Les Nuits fauves* (Cyril Collard, France, 1992) and *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, US, 1993), all of which convey relatively tragic impressions of the AIDS crisis and the experiences of PLWHAs, Waugh outlines a melancholic framework for the contemplation of the AIDS crisis that focusses on pain and grieving and invokes notions of martyrdom. The films that belong to the sub-genre are united in their explicit and head-on treatment of the crisis. They are 'films about AIDS', in the sense that their principal focus lies squarely on HIV and the experiences of individuals living with and dying from the virus. The prevalence of this particular sub-genre is indicative of the levels of societal and personal sorrow and bereavement caused by HIV/AIDS as well as the need felt by filmmakers to actively confront these emotions using film.

Within the conventions of sub-genres, filmmakers can craft characters who, acting against these distinct backdrops, can strongly evoke the human experiences triggered by HIV. In his discussion of the functions and constructions

of storytelling, John Yorke (2014) underlines the centrality to fictional stories (whether television or film-based) of the dramatic arc. In classically structured works of fiction, viewers expect to see key characters be propelled into action by a catalyst event, experience a series of personal and emotional changes and arrive at a form of either victory or defeat. In the case of HIV/AIDS, the teleology of the dramatic arc permits audiences to identify with certain protagonists, both PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs, to experience vicariously their evolving interactions with the illness, and to arrive at a conclusion, whether triumphant or tragic, that is revelatory and cathartic. In her essay 'Pictures of a Virus: Ideological Choices and the Representation of HIV', Mireille Rosello (1998: 345) argues that such films act as sites of storytelling that 'reintroduce the painful dimension of the infected body', a humanity that Rosello argues has been denied and neutralised by an overly scientific approach to the virus. In being honest about human suffering, such stories can achieve a form of freedom and self-assertion. The conventional storytelling techniques of feature films can thus act as sources of support and liberation for those living with HIV, or those whose understandings of the virus are constrained by discourses employed by mainstream media voices that foster climates of fear and encourage scapegoating and division.

The development of the feature film in Québec

The history and development of feature film in Québec can be traced through four distinct phases in a pattern unique to the province, the first of which relates to its long and complex relationship with Catholicism. The arrival of cinemas in Québec during the early twentieth century was an unwelcome one for the Church, who viewed the form of entertainment as a source of moral and cultural contamination that threatened Québec's puritanical roots and thus the Church's ideological control over its citizens, specifically painting American film as a vehicle for Jewish propaganda (MacKenzie, 2004: 93-95). In addition to circulating anti-Semitic diatribes against cinema, the Church made attempts to control films available for viewing by Quebeckers as well as the circumstances in which they were viewed. The Bureau de censure des vues animées, active from 1913 until 1967, an ostensibly state-controlled organisation but ultimately strongly influenced by the Catholic Church, censored over 7,000 films over the course of the twentieth

century, guided by an unfaltering respect for 'le puritanisme anglo-saxon et l'ultramontanisme catholique québécois' and thus banning films on the grounds of moral and cultural corruption (Québec, Régie du cinéma, [no date]). In urban and rural areas alike, films were often projected to citizens in church halls, where priests were able to decide which films were morally acceptable and which were not, thus becoming the gatekeeper to entertainment and exerting great influence over Québec's cinematic conscience. In the wake of the Laurier Palace cinema disaster in 1927, the Church's wishes to enact blanket censorship of cinema were granted, with the Boyer Commission banning all children under the age of sixteen from cinemas.⁹⁷ Though the huge societal shifts towards secularism and modernity of *la Révolution tranquille* were already nascent during the 1940s and 1950s, most film from this era, reflecting the continued domination of the Church over many aspects of Québec life and society, focussed at least in part on the Catholic clergy and the apparent force for good that it represented. Citing feature films such as *Le curé de village* (Paul Gury, 1949) and *Tit-Coq* (René Delacroix and Gratien Gélinas, 1952), Michel Houle (1980: 162) asserts that Québec cinema from this era was dominated by narratives that revolved principally around the vital figure of the *curé* as an enforcer of morality and order. The focus of the vast majority of films upon the positive and essential role of the Catholic Church in Québec society ensured that, from its very beginning, the province's feature film heritage was tied strongly to notions of moral integrity, tradition and respect for authority.

During the 1960s, *la Révolution tranquille* brought about the wholesale modernisation of Québec society and a rapid dismantling of the Catholic Church's framework of influence over the province's education, healthcare and welfare systems. Québec feature film could thus start to emerge as a fertile and popular form of entertainment. However, the great strides made during this period of great change towards secularisation were not entirely reflected in the province's emerging cinema. Whilst young filmmakers such as Claude Jutra and Gilles Groulx were establishing an avant-garde film scene, many other Québec

⁹⁷ On the 9th January 1927, the Laurier Palace cinema caught fire, killing 78 children who, trapped inside, were suffocated by smoke. Under the premise of the protection of children, the Church pushed for the enactment of the ban, one that would also prevent children from seeing any form of film other than those chosen by the Church. The ensuing ban on children in cinemas was enforced until 1961.

filmmakers (such as Jean-Claude Lord and Pierre Patry) were distinctly less radical and continued to produce film that adhered to a more traditional cinema of morals. Houle (1980: 164) further asserts that such filmmakers internalised a system of Catholic moral values to produce films that provide ‘variations on the theme of sin’ and that, whilst the clergy may have disappeared from the screen, religious ideology continued to motivate Québec cinema, at least thematically. Houle’s suggestion of Québec film’s enduring preoccupation with piety is echoed by Thomas Waugh (1981: 12-13), who characterises Québec cinema of the 1960s and 1970s as one paradoxically obsessed with sex. This assertion is based on the proliferation in Québec of locally-produced erotic, fictional feature-length film that was able to flourish after the relaxation of censorship, a trend typified by films such as *Valérie* (Denis Héroux, 1969), a softcore pornographic film that constitutes Québec’s first *film de fesses*, and by *Deux femmes en or* (Robert Charlebois, 1970). Québec cinema’s apparent shift towards a more sexually-explicit form of feature film could initially be interpreted as a collective rejection of the more traditional themes of morality and restraint. However, what both tendencies demonstrate is an unbroken preoccupation with taboos. Whether respected and enforced or explicitly flouted, sexual and moral taboos have been a consistent fixation of Québec feature film since the arrival and dissemination of cinematic technology across the province.

Chapter Two demonstrated how the development of documentary film in Québec was strongly influenced by approaches borrowed from the world of fictional film, namely the effective use of dramatisation to enhance the meaning and impact of the social realities being recorded. The relationship between non-fictional and fictional film in Québec was in fact symbiotic. A characteristic of Québec feature film of key importance in the second phase of its development is its preoccupation with *le réel*.⁹⁸ From the late-1950s onwards, a disparate group of filmmakers, inspired by contemporary collective desires for society-wide change and the revolutionary development and deployment of the documentary form of *Cinéma direct* taking place at the NFB, sought to create a form of fictional cinema that used the approaches and ethos of documentary filmmaking to best

⁹⁸ It is worth noting that, as a visual medium, film inevitably tends towards realism. This tendency is of course, however, refracted differently through the unique perspectives and styles of filmmakers and their selection and manipulation of footage.

capture and comment upon the realities of Québec society during a period of great change. Dubbed by Yves Lever (1995: 363) as examples of 'docu-drame', such films, including *À tout prendre* (Claude Jutra, 1964) and *Le chat dans le sac* (Gilles Groulx, 1964) used the lightweight and mobile film and sound equipment developed by documentarists to place great visual and aural emphasis on capturing fictional narratives as directly and spontaneously as possible. These films, characterised by their minimal levels of scripting, staging and editing, allowed Quebeckers to discover a new sense of self-assurance and distinct national identity through a form of grounded, fictional feature film unique to their society.

Québec feature film entered a third phase in the 1970s, as filmmakers, having thoroughly established an understanding of Québec's distinctive collective identity as a nation, sought to explore and comment upon the lives of the various subcultures and marginalised groups of their newly redefined society. Films by Denys Arcand such as *Réjeanne Padovani* (1973), the tale of a family connected to the Italian mafia and implicated in corrupt public construction contracts and *Gina* (1975), the story of a stripper who, after being raped, seeks revenge on her attackers, cemented Arcand's career as a feature-film maker whose fictional works were strongly grounded in contemporary social realities. *Il était une fois dans l'est* (André Brassard, 1974) places queer subcultures under the spotlight, blending the stories of drag queens, gays, housewives and a pregnant teenager to create an interwoven portrait of life and diversity in Montréal's Plateau Mont-Royal neighbourhood. These films, argues Houle (1980: 174-175), demonstrate a new desire to take a closer look at the lives and issues of marginalised demographics and fringe cultures. Popular fictional feature film produced during the 1970s in Québec thus proved itself capable of addressing important societal questions including those of politics, identity, equality, class and heteronormativity.

The fourth and most recent phase of Québec feature film is marked by the shift towards a more commercial and international form of cinema. Coinciding with the failure of the first referendum on sovereignty, Québec feature film of the 1980s witnessed an abandonment of the questioning of the identity, development and 'important issues' of Québec society by which it had previously been defined (Véronneau, 2006: 100). In its place there evolved a form of a cinema that, by

focussing principally on the concerns of the individual in the postmodern world rather than locally-specific societal questions, gained much greater global appeal. This fundamental shift towards a more financially lucrative form of cinema was crystallised by the aims and objectives of the Société générale du cinéma québécois (SGCQ).⁹⁹ Founded in 1983 by the Québec government, the funding body established commercial success as a criteria for the awarding of any provincial film funding to Québec filmmakers (Véronneau, 2006: 102). Denys Arcand, for example, achieved great critical and popular success during the 1980s, principally with *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* (1986), which was nominated in the category of Foreign Language Film at the 1987 Academy Awards and *Jésus de Montréal* (1989), which won the Prix du Jury at Cannes in 1989; both films were supported by the SGCQ and its successors. These films, which stage more universal preoccupations and were filmed with high production values, show how Québec feature film became more outward-looking thematically and more cinematically compelling, attracting not only a national audience but also an international one.

This chapter will examine four feature-length films, all of which either touch upon the AIDS crisis as it was experienced in relation to Québec or were produced by Québécois filmmakers, that contemplate different aspects of the AIDS crisis from very different perspectives: *Le Déclin de l'empire américain* (Denys Arcand, 1986) and *Love and Human Remains* (Denys Arcand, 1993), both of which make allusions to HIV, as well as *Zero Patience* (John Greyson, 1993) and *L'Escorte* (Denis Langlois, 1996), both of which directly confront the AIDS crisis. It will consider how the specificities of the four different sub-genres are exploited by the films' creators to cast HIV/AIDS in a variety of distinct lights and how each film uses characterisation and the dramatic arc, backed by the resources of camera work and soundtrack, to recount stories about HIV/AIDS through carefully crafted protagonists.

⁹⁹ In 1988, the SGCQ became the Société générale des industries culturelles (SOGIC). Since 1995, the funding body has been known as the Société de développement des entreprises culturelles (SODEC).

***Le Déclin de l'empire américain* (Denys Arcand, 1986)**

Denys Arcand's 1986 film *Le Déclin de l'empire américain*, released only four years into the AIDS crisis as it was experienced in Canada, is a relatively early example of HIV/AIDS-related film and the first Québec film of any genre to allude to the AIDS crisis. The press review conducted in Chapter One demonstrated the hysteria with which HIV was frequently treated throughout the 1980s. An analysis of *Le Déclin* and its reception can therefore indicate to what extent Québec cinema's first reference to the AIDS crisis was constructive or problematic.

Denys Arcand has played a pivotal role in the development of Québec cinema both during and after *la Révolution tranquille*. An historian by training, he began his career in film at the NFB producing Francophone documentaries. These films were politically and socially engaged, forming part of the corpus of documentary films that investigated and gave form to conceptions of Québec as a distinct nation and society. Arcand's productions included *On est au coton* (1970) and *Québec : Duplessis et après* (1972). *On est au coton* mounted a scathing critique of the exploitation of Francophone workers by their Anglophone employers, thus suggesting the need for Quebeckers to unite and rebel against the position of inferiority imposed upon them. In *Québec: Duplessis et après*, Arcand compared the Québec provincial elections of 1936 with those of 1970 as a means of questioning the extent to which Québec society had actually been changed by *la Révolution tranquille*. Both documentaries considered prominent and divisive questions of great pertinence to contemporary Québec society setting them in wide-ranging historical contexts.

With several successful and provocative documentaries under his belt, Arcand then moved into feature film, a shift towards fiction that should not, however, be interpreted as a move towards a less socially relevant form of cinema. On the contrary, these works of fiction successfully engage with a number of contemporary social questions. For example, *Réjeanne Padovani* (1973), a drama that revolves around the events of a dinner party hosted by a crooked construction magnate, confronts the themes of corruption, power, politics and family in an accessible narrative framework that successfully combines entertainment with social commentary for a mass audience. *Gina* (1975) is another socially-engaged, distinctly Québécois drama that tells the story of a club dancer who seeks revenge on the group of men by whom she was sexually

attacked. The film raises important questions of sexuality, femininity and self-empowerment against the backdrop of rural Québec and the traditional, parochial values that such a landscape embodies. In the 1970s Arcand had thus proved himself to be a filmmaker whose self-confessed *approche historique* allowed him to produce feature film that was at once entertaining, popular and deeply engaged with the realities and contemporary issues of Québec society.¹⁰⁰

The directness of Arcand's approach to contemporary issues in his documentary films, and the continuing impact of that directness in his feature films of the 1970s, contrast with the tangential and circumspect reference that he makes to (the possibility of) AIDS in *Le Déclin*. The setting of these allusions to HIV in a wider and more nuanced consideration of the social and political climate and mores of 1980s Québec produces a consideration of the illness that is contextualised and relativised by the specificity of its historical and spatial setting, and is arguably thus more constructively rooted in a highly localised historical and contemporary context.

Decadence and comedy

Le Déclin takes the form of a risqué sex comedy that investigates the changing ideas of nationhood, relationship and commitment in 1980s post-referendum Québec. The narrative of the film emerges from the events that transpire when a group of affluent Montréal-based academics gather for a weekend at a lakeside retreat in rural Québec. The majority of the film's protagonists are baby-boomers, the children of the post-war years who helped to instigate the political, social and sexual revolutions that defined Western society as a whole, and notably that of Québec, during the 1960s and 1970s. In contrast, however, the younger members of the group only reached adulthood as the decline of idealism and rise of capitalism and neo-liberalism took hold towards the end of the 1970s. Regardless of age, all members of the group appear thoroughly disengaged from the goals of social justice, idealism and equality that characterised the period of *la Révolution tranquille*. It would appear that the boomers have swapped the noble causes of changing the world and demanding societal equality for

¹⁰⁰ 'Dans la vie, que je m'intéresse à l'urbanisme, à l'écologie ou à l'institution du mariage, j'ai naturellement tendance à y réfléchir en termes historiques' (Abel, 1990: 110).

pleasures of a more carnal nature. *Le Déclin* was explicitly marketed for release as a sex comedy, a characterisation that can be justified by the film's extensive documentation of the protagonists' decadent, adventurous and often comical sexual antics. It relies for dramatic effect much less on the dramatic arc than on the different modes of farce, comedy, and parody conveyed by the cross-cutting of bed-hopping scenes, the group's self-indulgent discussion of sexual activities and their witty repartee. The group is composed of a married couple (Rémy and Louise), unmarried couples (Diane and Mario, Pierre and Danielle) and singletons (Dominique, Alain and Claude). Regardless of relationship status, all of the protagonists take pleasure in recounting personal stories of a titillating nature at some point during the film. The discussion of group sex, S&M, massage parlours, affairs, prostitutes, holiday romances, outdoor sex and a general discussion of both the male and female anatomy are all pursued with much excitement and varying degrees of vulgarity. Several of the anecdotes are accompanied by flashbacks that demonstrate the situation described, rendering sex omnipresent both visually and within the dialogue.

For around the first half of the film, the protagonists are divided along the lines of gender, with the women working out at a gym in Montréal whilst the men prepare the forthcoming evening meal at the rural retreat, awaiting the arrival of the women. Men and women alike seem to be equally engaged in an unspoken competition with other members of their group, aimed at outdoing each other with progressively more risqué stories demonstrating their sexual prowess. As the film progresses, it transpires that several of the friends have slept with each other, both in and out of wedlock. The film's comedic treatment of the friends' bed-hopping antics and associated infidelities demonstrates their hedonistic pursuit of selfish pleasure, a focus reinforced and epitomised by the references made throughout the film to Dominique's latest book, *Variances de l'idée du bonheur*, a work that criticises Western society as one now in decline and motivated solely by the search for instant gratification.

At first glance, it might appear that *Le Déclin* aligns itself with the broad shift away from a politically and socially engaged cinema towards a more individualistic form of film typical of Québec cinema of the 1980s. However, such an evaluation misses the social critique that subtly underpins the portrayal of the attitudes and behaviours of the protagonists. The meal at the chalet provides the

dénouement necessary to turn *Le Déclin* from being a simplistic farce into a nuanced meditation on contemporary morality and intimacy. It is Dominique's revelation at dinner that she has slept with both Pierre and Rémy, a fact of which Danielle and Louise were unaware, that sends shockwaves through the group. The announcement, and the negative reaction to the news from his wife Louise, turns Rémy from a boastful Lothario into a nervous wreck. The exposing of his infidelity throws into doubt the solidity of his marriage, something he previously took for granted. All members of the group take less delight in speaking of their apparently insatiable sexual appetites once the emotional costs of such an attitude are laid bare. The varying reactions of the group members to Dominique's announcement suggest that all of the individuals present are perhaps more conservative and fragile than their sexual boasting suggested. It would appear that their sexual posturing was exactly that, a display of over-compensation and a self-defence mechanism, in the face of a lack of interest in anything 'meaningful' that acts as proof of their authenticity and self-worth (Larose, 1987: 11-13). *Le Déclin* thus underscores the negative effects that individualism, sexual hedonism and disengagement from society can exert upon the wellbeing of the individual and the integrity of social groups. This message is particularly pertinent in the context of 1980s Québec, where the failure of the provincial referendum on sovereignty in 1980 and the ratification of the 1982 federal Constitution Act without the agreement of Québec provoked a collective disengagement from the identity politics by which the province had been defined since the mid-century.

Claude

Le Déclin uses the sub-genre of the sex comedy to cast modern-day hedonism as a hollow display of bravado and as symptomatic of the political and social disaffection experienced across the Western world, including Québec. It is within this meditation on shifting contemporary morals that HIV is explored via the story and actions of one of the protagonists, Claude. This interaction is one that can be interpreted as both problematic and constructive. Claude is a university art historian who appears to be in his thirties. He is charming, smart and confident

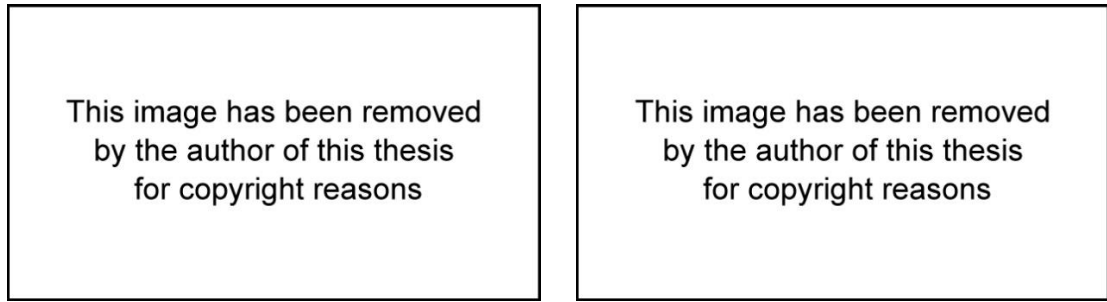


Illustration 8

and seems well-liked by all members of the group. In terms of his physique, he is slender, relatively handsome, well-dressed and moustached. His mannerisms and mode of self-expression are slightly camp; he gesticulates, is dramatic in his movements and his dialogue is littered with quips and witty, deprecating banter. Through his words and actions, it becomes clear that Claude is a gay man. He is open about his sexuality amongst his friends, telling them of his sexual adventures with great enthusiasm. These stories, and Claude's sexuality, appear to be welcomed and accepted by the rest of the group.

The implicit suggestion that Claude is HIV-positive arguably reinforces pre-existing stereotypes that relate to gay men and thus, by extension, to HIV positivity. In particular, Arcand's portrayal of Claude indicates a direct connection between gay men and 'risky' sexual behaviour, a link whose ability to stir negative responses to HIV including panic and fear was analysed and documented in Chapter One. Claude's seropositivity is implied in two key scenes. In the first, as Claude is preparing the evening meal, he excuses himself to visit the bathroom. He is then depicted urinating copious amounts of blood into the toilet bowl. At this moment, Arcand uses a series of cuts to bring attention to the situation. A close-up of Claude's face depicts him as he looks down at the toilet; the camera then cuts to a mid-range close-up of the toilet bowl into which Claude's bloody urine falls. A second cut takes the viewer back to Claude's face, now visibly panic-stricken and sweating (illustration 8). He finishes and returns to the kitchen, where the others notice his concern and ask why his mood has dramatically changed. He replies by stating that his stress stems from his sauce's refusal to thicken adequately; the issue is then left alone. The scene is highly ambiguous; in the first instance, the urinating of blood does not constitute one of the well-known symptoms of any AIDS-related condition. It thus remains unclear what specific

problem threatens Claude's health. Subsequently, in the second key scene, Claude confides to Diane that he is waiting for the results from a series of tests related to his contaminated urine. However, neither the nature of these tests nor the possibility of HIV or AIDS are ever explicitly mentioned by Claude.

The film's only direct reference to HIV comes from Rémy, whose remarks bring into play the possibility of Claude's seropositivity. In a later scene, Claude's hiding of a secret is further underscored by an interaction with Rémy. Whilst Claude is in the kitchen kneading the bread dough for the evening's meal, Rémy asks jokingly whether he has AIDS and whether he should have both hands in the evening's meal.¹⁰¹ In jest, Claude replies by asking whether Rémy would like a saliva sample to verify his HIV status; the issue is then dropped. The moment, though brief, ensures that the viewer is cued into the idea of Claude as possibly living with HIV/AIDS; it also hints at underlying group dynamics and casts poignant social commentary over societal misconceptions of HIV. Rémy's joking indicates that he is not aware of Claude's current health problems; if he were, he would surely have avoided making such an insensitive joke, while Claude's reaction to the gag once more highlights his performative role and status as the joker of the group and the corresponding need to keep his potential seropositivity veiled in silence. Considered from Rémy's perspective, the moment serves only to underline his naivety. It is clear that, from his jocular tone, he does not genuinely believe that Claude would be able to infect his friends with HIV through the vector of bread. However, the fact that he feels it appropriate to make such a joke at Claude's expense in the first place demonstrates his ignorance of the situation and general lack of tact. Considered within the context of the era, the moment also indicates Arcand's willingness to comment upon contemporary misconceptions relating to the virus. Even as the transmission routes of HIV were proven by science to be relatively limited, the fallacy that the virus was transmittable via touch continued to circulate and cause hysteria among those whose fears overpowered their sense of rationality. Arcand's referencing of this societal misbelief through Rémy gives the joke a two-fold implicit and symptomatic meaning that subtly emphasises the foolishness of those who believed in the untruth.

¹⁰¹ 'T'es sûr que t'as pas le sida? Les deux mains dans la pâte!'

After the toilet scene, Claude tells his own tale of sexual adventure to the other men. In a similar fashion to the stories of the other protagonists, Claude's tale is recounted via a flashback accompanied with narration. In particular, Claude speaks of his penchant for cruising, the practice whereby MSM frequent spaces, both outdoors (natural or urban) and indoors (saunas and nightclubs), looking for sexual encounters with other like-minded individuals. The act is one often defined by silence, with interest, consent and rejection usually conveyed by the power of body language and the look. Those sexual encounters that occur in outdoor spaces are, in the eyes of a family-oriented, heterosexual society, historically associated with illegality and shame and, during the AIDS crisis, have been associated with 'risky' sexual practices and the transmission of HIV amongst MSM. Claude's relationship with cruising is portrayed as one that is compulsive. Speaking to the others at the chalet, he expresses an acute awareness of the dangers associated with the activity, but acknowledges that arousal usually overpowers prudence and common sense. Claude's character thus resonates with Shilts's concept of the 'fast-lane gay', a stereotype of gay men who prioritise sexual gratification above all else.¹⁰² The flashback reveals a dance-like scene set on the slopes of Mont Royal in Montréal, a site reputed for cruising since at least the 1950s and known colloquially as 'la jungle' (Higgins, 1999: 51) in which Claude and a host of other cruisers glide through the wooded area exchanging knowing glances. Reminiscent of the cruising sequence depicted in Gaglardi's *Quand l'amour est gai* studied in Chapter Two, the scene underscores the sexual tension that defines the atmosphere as well as the performative nature of the act. Taking a detour from the path and into the woods in search of a potential partner, Claude comes across a mounted policeman patrolling the area known for illegal activity. However, the policeman plays into the homoerotic charge of the moment. Towering over Claude, he is brawny, leather-clad and moustachioed, and resembles a Tom of Finland cartoon more than a Montréal city police officer.¹⁰³ The portrayal of Claude's (over-active) sex drive is reminiscent of the derogatory typecasting of homosexuals as perverts that can be observed in the popular Québec cinema of the 1970s (Waugh, 1981:

¹⁰² For a detailed consideration of the 'fast-lane gay', see Chapter Two, pp.83-85.

¹⁰³ For a detailed consideration of Tom of Finland, see Chapter Two, p.94.

15). His seemingly-insatiable sexual appetite is also evident at the chalet. He visibly lusts after both Mario, Diane's leather-bound biker boyfriend, and Alain, the youngest member of the group, with his angelic looks and tantalisingly short shorts.

Arcand's decision to allude to HIV via a sub-plot embodied by a lone individual means that the development of Claude's personal dramatic arc and his potential traumatic medical status remains limited, only superficially explored, and that the viewer is prevented from accompanying him to the end of his emotional and physical journey, whatever that may be. The suggestion of his HIV-positive status and the demonstration of his sexual habits is thus left open in the first instance to a negative interpretation, confirming a widespread public belief, given currency by prominent voices in the media, that gay men engaging in aberrant and compulsive sexual behaviour were responsible for their own infection by HIV and the sole vectors of the disease. However, a simplistic reading of this sort fails to take account of the social climate of the era, the broader context and themes of *Le Déclin* and the effects that these may have upon Arcand's portrayal of Claude as a potentially HIV-positive gay man. The two potent scenes hinting at Claude's unnamed yet symbolically charged health problem, in tandem with Rémy's subsequent remark, no doubt cued many audience members to (mis)diagnose Claude's condition, even though none of his symptoms and behaviours (the bloody urine, cruising on Mont Royal and upcoming medical tests) categorically confirm an HIV diagnosis.¹⁰⁴ The brevity of the passing reference to the illness, together with its throwaway, jocular tone, succinctly convey however the taboo nature of the virus, accurately reflecting the contemporary fear it so strongly inspired and the veil of silence that hung over discussion of it. Through Claude, Arcand holds up a mirror to the audience, underscoring the desire of society to allay fear and gain a protective sense of certainty and control by distancing itself from those suspected of being carriers of infection. Using Claude's situation to comment on the labelling of HIV-positive people, Arcand thus obliges his viewers to consider their own attitudes towards HIV and those living with the virus.

¹⁰⁴ *Les Invasions barbares* (2003) was released as the sequel to *Le Déclin de l'empire américain*. This film depicts Claude as being alive and well, nearly twenty years later.

If the viewer does presume Claude's HIV-positive status as given, Arcand's characterisation of his protagonist has the important effect of successfully re-humanising conceptions of HIV as a lived experience, in line with Rosello's view of film as an effective means of reintroducing the human cost of the virus to AIDS discourses dominated by rational and impersonal science. Claude's personal characteristics contradict prevailing imagery that posits PLWHAs as isolated outsiders. He is a popular member of the friendship group, whose role within it appears distinctly nurturing and caring; in labouring over the evening's much-vaunted meal, an intricate coulibiac, he provides for all members of the group and supplies the focal point for the entire evening.¹⁰⁵ Of all the relationships evident between the different protagonists, it is arguably however Claude's relationship with Diane that comes across as being one of the most genuine, nurturing and stable.¹⁰⁶ Both are compulsively engaged in 'risky' relationships and activities and would be judged as outsiders by general public opinion, but their living with danger brings them together as kindred spirits who understand each other's situations. Beyond this particular friendship, Claude also stands out however as the most emotionally engaged and giving member of the group, providing crucial solace to Louise in her distress at the end of the film over the discovery of Rémy's infidelity.

Analysing Claude's character in isolation could lead one to the conclusion that Claude merely perpetuates the prevailing stereotypes associated with gay men during the unfolding of the AIDS crisis. However, when considered in the broader context of the film's overarching themes, the characterisation of Claude represents a constructive and provocative consideration of what it means to be a gay man in the era of AIDS. Arcand's signature *approche historique* ensures that *Le Déclin* connects the actions and stories of the film's protagonists to the social and political contexts of Québec during the 1980s. By alluding to HIV in the context of a sex comedy, *Le Déclin* includes the virus in a broad consideration of

¹⁰⁵ Claude's seemingly endless preparation of the coulibiac, a highly elaborate gastronomic import from Russia consisting of salmon, eggs and mushrooms baked in pastry, makes him appear even more dedicated to his friends and strengthens his role as the group's mother figure.

¹⁰⁶ Diane is a non-tenured academic who is engaged in a repeated cycle of willing submission and exploitative abuse with her boyfriend Mario. She speaks of her pleasure at being dominated and abused by him and expresses her fear that a lack of self-restraint could result in injury or worse. Compared with her male counterparts and with Dominique, Diane is also exploited professionally. To make ends meet, she works long hours on precarious contracts and also has to produce Radio-Canada cultural broadcasts.

the bigger, moral questions of the era related to sexuality and intimacy that is both humorous and poignant. By making an allusion to HIV via Claude, *Le Déclin* casts the AIDS crisis as just one part of a much larger landscape of neo-liberal, post-modern disenchantment, obsessed with consumption (sexual or material) and prone to both superficiality and greed. HIV/AIDS is incorporated into a critique of all that is wrong with the era, an inclusive approach that stands in contrast to predominant reactions that sought to consider the virus in isolation. Against this backdrop, Claude sheds much light on the experiences and fears of gay men during the AIDS crisis. He is honest about his promiscuity however, in contrast with predominant stereotypes, he is not defined by this fact; he is a warm, friendly, likeable man who has friends, feelings and fears of his own. As such, his portrayal adds depth and nuance to prevalent stereotypes of gay men and their suffering PLWHA counterpart. Arcand's explicit and thematic consideration of HIV means that Claude's sub-plot does not need to be laboured for it to be revelatory and provocative.

***Love and Human Remains* (Denys Arcand, 1993)**

Le Déclin is not the only film of Arcand's corpus to reference the AIDS crisis. In 1993, he released the English-language *Love and Human Remains*, an adaptation of *Unidentified Human Remains and the True Nature of Love*, a stage play by Canadian dramatist Brad Fraser that premiered in 1989. Dubbed and released for Francophone audiences as *De l'amour et des restes humains*, *Love and Human Remains* shares several similarities with *Le Déclin*, offering a study of sex, relationships and intimacy in an era of political and social disaffection, rampant sexual and material consumerism and individualism. Once again, demonstrating Arcand's continued use of an *approche historique*, reference to HIV is tangential, subsumed within the larger picture of the social and moral decay of the West in the late twentieth century. Where the two films differ completely, however, is in Arcand's choice of sub-genre. Whilst *Le Déclin* alludes to HIV in the context of a sex comedy, *Love and Human Remains* considers the virus in the setting of a *film noir*-inspired thriller, a sub-genre characterised by strong dramatic intrigue and suspense, set in unnerving worlds. Therefore, whereas the overall tone of *Le Déclin* was one of tongue-in-cheek humour and

wit, *Love and Human Remains* constitutes a far more sombre and chilling interpretation of both the era and the virus.

Dystopia and indifference

Love and Human Remains uses characterisation, setting and intrigue to paint a melancholic and disconcerting picture of North American life in the 1990s. The film follows the lives of four principal characters who are all trying (and failing) to negotiate love, friendship and lust and discover a sense of self-worth and purpose in an era defined by uncertainty and detachment. David, perhaps the most emotionally detached of the foursome, a characteristic exemplified by his stringing along of a young suitor named Kane, is an unsuccessful actor turned waiter, a dry-witted and disenchanted gay man in his late twenties. Candy, his flatmate, is an aspiring writer of a similar age who is coming to terms with her potential bisexuality. After a brief period of romantic courtship (during which David was in denial over his sexuality), the pair have become best friends. Candy could best be described as clingy, seeking the affections of inappropriate men and constantly pestering an unresponsive David. Bernie is David's best friend and, in many respects, his antithesis. Whilst David occupies a position at the bottom of the social hierarchy as a waiter, Bernie is a city slicker working in the civil service. He is an intense character whose constant state of agitation contrasts with David's permanent state of indifference. The fourth protagonist, Sal, is another of David's friends who is also gay, but with slightly camp tendencies. He acts as David's wing man on nights out and also provides his friend with occasional sexual favours. In similar fashion to Candy, he makes great efforts to gain David's affection, receiving little in return. He is the most dejected member of the friendship group, whose life of quick sex and drugs in nightclubs leaves him dissatisfied and unfulfilled.

As with *Le Déclin*, the key mode of *Love and Human Remains* is entropy, with the film's four characters drifting aimlessly through life, from one lugubrious drama to the next. The interpretation of 'love in the 90s' (the tagline of the English release of the film) provided by Arcand's adaptation, is primarily conveyed by David and Candy, whose personalities, actions and modes of communication with the other protagonists convey a profound sense of disaffection, lost-ness

and decline. Both of their plotlines are essentially concerned with their dating lives and are marked by indecision, conflict and disengagement in their sexual behaviours. Both flatmates are content to mislead their potential partners and cause emotional distress. Sexual desire, both hetero- and homosexual, is depicted as something distinctly brief, detached and fraught with dishonesty. David in particular appears to be going through the motions of living, using deadpan humour to disguise his lack of commitment to the concepts of a career, self-worth and love. The body language of both main protagonists is consistently guarded and inexpressive and conveys a broad sense of disdain. The dialogue of *Love and Human Remains* plays an equally important part in creating a sense of disjointedness and inertia. Conversation between all the protagonists is very curt, with dialogue often constructed from trite and non-committal phrases. The answering machine is used by both Fraser and Arcand as a trope that symbolises a lack of communication; both David and Candy have an irritating tendency not to answer the telephone and thus oblige their callers to leave messages. The machine thus signifies the pair's self-absorbed reluctance to communicate. The slow and often stilted pace of the film is further underlined by Arcand's use of editing, with slow tracking and panning shots and long takes often exaggerating the lengthy silences built into the film's dialogue.

The depiction of their disaffected mood is greatly strengthened by the setting in which they find themselves, or in other words by Arcand's use of *mise-en-scène*. The film's variety of indoor urban settings, including supermarkets, shopping malls, dive bars and diners are often sterile, dour and gloomy, giving the film a muted colour palette that in turn further colours the grey mood of the protagonists. The outdoor cityscape they inhabit is consistently depicted as dark, grey and anonymously North-American. In the original play, Fraser intended this to be the case, creating a city (based extensively on his hometown of Edmonton, Alberta) that could represent any Canadian metropolis. Fraser's soulless vision has been translated effectively by Arcand, whose cityscape is filled with shadows, concrete and coldness; this bleakness and lack of rootedness within a specific location resonates with the protagonists' lack of direction and impetus. The film's soundtrack is sparse, with the sound of TVs, radios, video arcades and non-committal chatter providing a background of white noise that underscores the incoherence of the film's world.

Bernie

The apathy of both David and Candy means that their dramatic arcs remain relatively undeveloped; neither character makes much progress in terms of realising positive change, or indeed any form of change at all. If the pair had remained the film's only protagonists, *Love and Human Remains* would have been defined solely by disorienting entropy; fortunately, however, this is not the case. The character of Bernie provides an underlying sub-plot that turns the film into a thriller and brings a vital sense of structure and development to the other characters' inertia. It is also through the character of Bernie that Arcand makes the first of two allusions to HIV, thus placing the virus against a backdrop of disenchantment and disintegration and within a consideration of the broader social and moral climate of the age; both of Arcand's allusions to the virus successfully explore its hidden nature.

In terms of his sexual habits, Bernie the yuppie can be characterised as compulsive and reckless. His lurching from one anonymous sexual encounter to the next, coupled with his demeaning treatment of women, establishes a strong connection between financial prowess and greed on the one hand and machismo and sexual consumption on the other. At the very end of the film, this trait of Bernie's character takes on a new, deadly meaning. Both the play and the film feature a murderous 'whodunnit' sub-plot of a killer prowling the streets of David and Candy's city in search of young female victims. This is referred to via news reports on the TV in their apartment and in conversation between them. At first glance, the relevance of this subplot can seem unclear and incongruous with the film's principal focus upon David and Candy's meandering romantic trials and tribulations. However, the film climaxes with the revelation that Bernie is in fact the murderer. David confronts Bernie with the discovery, and, as the police are heard approaching, Bernie jumps to his death from the roof of David's apartment building.

Claude Giroux (1996: 34) provides an insightful interpretation of Bernie's symbolic meaning, proposing that he crystallises masculine anger and violence as a reaction to male sexual frustration and humiliation. Building upon Giroux's hypothesis, I further propose that, owing to his character, actions and symbolic

qualities, Bernie can also be read as a symbol of HIV. One particular scene, in which David and Bernie discuss attitudes towards safer sex, specifically suggests the laxity of Bernie's attitude towards AIDS. Although David is indifferent to relationships, he is not indifferent to protection against HIV, speaking of the need to use condoms and of the virus's indiscriminate nature. Bernie, however, does not agree, seeing himself as protected from HIV by his heterosexuality and therefore immune and invincible. The viewer is also privy to Bernie's taste for extreme sexual gratification. The scene in which Bernie appears with David's dominatrix friend, Benita, provides a direct demonstration of his penchant for sexual aggression, and in discussion of the news coverage of the killings by David and Candy, it further emerges that the murderer is also a sexual aggressor. The evidence thus begins to build to the identification of Bernie as the sexual assailant and killer. Additionally, he is consistently marked by human blood. On more than one occasion, he arrives unexpectedly at David's flat in the middle of the night, passing off both his panic and blood-soaked clothes as the result of bar brawls. The climax of the film indicates that the blood and the panic were in fact the result of the murders he had just committed. His murderous impulses, coupled with his apparently insatiable sexual urges, create a deeply disturbing portrait of a sexual decadence that is psychotic and uncontrollable. The climate of fear around the AIDS crisis in the 1990s when *Love and Human Remains* was produced lends support to a metaphorical reading of Bernie, an aggressive, highly sexualised, out-of-control, blood-stained killer on the loose in a bleak urban setting, as a symbol of HIV, a personification that resonates with Sontag's analysis of deadly metaphor and its problematic role in the understanding of HIV/AIDS.¹⁰⁷ Considered in this light, Bernie could be interpreted as an unhelpful form of shorthand for the virus, whose reliance on pre-existing, negative imagery associated with HIV contributes to the broad climate of panic surrounding the virus and those it touches. Arcand's use of setting and mise-en-scène further exaggerates Bernie's troubling personality. In contrast to the film's other protagonists, he is almost exclusively depicted at night time, whether this be on the roof of David and Candy's apartment building or driving around the city. Up-lighting frequently casts chilling shadows across his face, disfiguring his

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter One, pp.14-15.

physiognomy and marking him out as abnormal. His nocturnal existence, combined with his cloak-like raincoat, casts him as a dangerous and vampiric villain, stalking the metropolis whilst its inhabitants sleep. Bernie's embodiment of the figure of the vampire, a metaphor whose potent blend of blood, transgression and malice made it a recurrent feature in popular responses to HIV (Caron, 2001: 108), allows Arcand to further succinctly evoke the hidden, silent and ruthless nature of the virus and the havoc it wreaked on unsuspecting communities throughout the 1990s. Reading Bernie as a metaphor for HIV also offers an occasion for more positive deliberation on the illness and the factors behind its spread. His character and storyline implicitly explain the virus not as being caused by the irresponsibility of certain demographics, but as being characteristic of a broad culture of sexual greed and societal disintegration. Furthermore, Bernie's effect on his fellow protagonists is also one that is ultimately beneficial. Following his best friend's revelation and death, David decides to leave the world of hospitality to pursue his abandoned dream of an acting career and to treat Kane, his companion, with the respect that he deserves. The unmasking of Bernie's cold-blooded, random acts of violence shakes David out of his permanent state of indifference and inspires him to take a more proactive role in his future. In relation to the overall structure and themes of *Love and Human Remains*, Bernie thus acts both as the film's key source of dramatic intrigue and as the stimulus for David to finally move towards making positive changes to his life. Considered in the specific context of AIDS, Bernie underscores how, for many, the pervasive mortality of HIV acted as a wake-up call that provoked a widespread questioning of life's priorities and the values assigned to sex, intimacy and self-worth.

Sal

Within *Love and Human Remains*, Arcand makes a second allusion to HIV, this time through the character of Sal, whose HIV-positive status is heavily implied, though never confirmed. In terms of his outward appearance, Sal fulfils certain characteristics of negative stereotypes associated with gay men; he dresses flamboyantly, appears only to exist in the confines of a nightclub and talks explicitly with David about gay sex. Sal's story and situation are told over four key

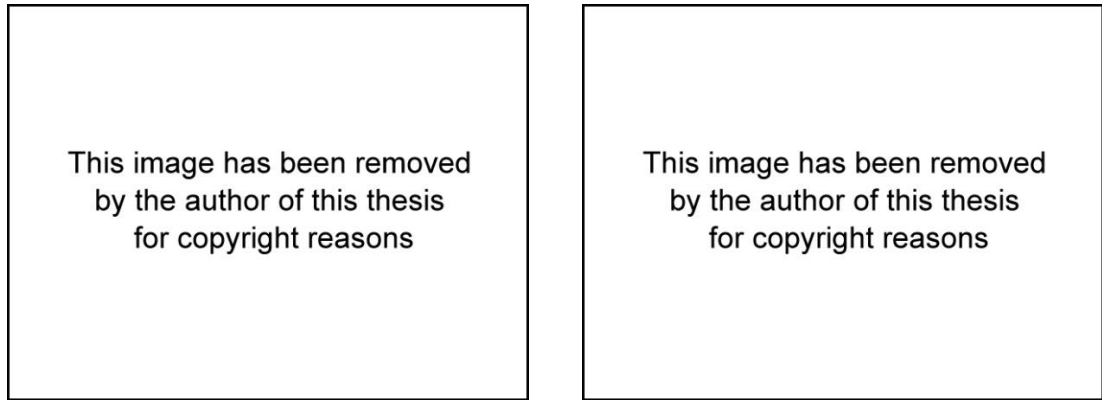


Illustration 9

scenes. In the first instance, both he and David are seen in the club. It would appear that they are well-established friends, with dialogue and body-language indicating familiarity and mutual appreciation. They find a quiet corner, where they smoke marijuana together and Sal performs oral sex on David. The scene is both sleazy and depressing, with the dim lighting and thumping music of the disco rendering the moment between the two cold and impersonal. David asks Sal whether what they are about to do is safe; Sal's reply ('are you interested in living in a world where it's not?') suggests a desire on his part to engage in safer sexual activities.¹⁰⁸ As Sal provides David with the sexual favour, the camera focusses on David's face, his expressions and drug-induced laughter suggesting a selfish form of disinterest, even as Sal carries out the act, which makes Sal appear subservient to David's whims. On the second occasion, the pair are reunited under the roof of the nightclub. However, David is accompanied by a new anonymous suitor. As it becomes clear that David and his newfound friend intend to go home and spend the night together, a close-up shot of Sal's face captures his expression of longing and disappointment, suggesting a dawning sense of being exploited by his friend. On the third occasion, Sal is seen in a shopping mall leaving a medical clinic noticeably shaken. Of particular interest is a poster on the wall of the clinic by artist Keith Haring, a New York-based artist and PLWHA, whose colourful posters depicting abstract dancing figures became synonymous with the AIDS activism movement. The work depicted is entitled *Ignorance = Fear*, a poster created by Haring in 1989 that champions vocal action

¹⁰⁸ During the AIDS crisis, oral sex was promoted by safer sex activists as a more prudent (yet just as enjoyable) form of intimacy than penetrative anal sex.

against institutional and societal indifference towards HIV/AIDS through the slogan 'Silence = Death', a slogan coined and used frequently by members of the ACT-UP movement. Having left the clinic, Sal finds a telephone and leaves a message on David's answering machine, informing him that he has recently been having sinus problems (illustration 9). The phone call is cut short, with a cut taking the viewer away from the mall and Sal's situation. Later on, between his third and fourth appearances, Sal is heard via the answering machine in David and Candy's apartment. The machine plays the message left by Sal in the mall, revealing his news in its entirety. Though his wording is oblique and, strictly speaking, inconclusive, Sal heavily implies that he has discovered that he is HIV-positive.¹⁰⁹ As the film concludes, David, Kane and Candy chance upon Sal standing in a snow-filled alley. David asks a slightly gaunt-looking Sal how he is doing, to which he drily replies 'I'm alive'. The sequence then concludes with his walking off into the distance, coughing as he leaves. The perspective of the shot emphasises Sal's isolated position as he walks away from the others down the alleyway into the snow, whilst the bright whiteness of the scene makes him appear drained and his figure gaunter than before.

It must be noted that Sal's presence is far stronger in *Love and Human Remains* than was originally the case in *Unidentified Human Remains and the Nature of Love*. In Fraser's play, Sal is only referred to by Candy, who informs David of the messages he has left on the answering machine regarding his test results. Arcand clearly saw undeveloped potential in Sal's character, transforming him into one of the film's four main protagonists and using him to reflect productively upon the social and emotional situation of a gay male PLWHA and particularly on the unspeakable nature of AIDS. The audience of *Love and Human Remains* is invited to diagnose Sal as a PLWHA through a series of cues and symbols, namely drug-fuelled and daring sexual activity, the mentioning of medical tests, health problems and 'the virus', as well as the visibility of bodily change and malfunction. Sal's refusal to explicitly address his test results, coupled with the indirectness of Arcand's allusions to some of the visible symptoms of the virus, reflects the contemporary climate of silence and surrounding HIV and underscores the powerful sense of fear felt both by those

¹⁰⁹ 'I've got the virus. Not the disease, just the virus.'

facing a HIV-positive future and by the general public. The Haring poster on the clinic wall acts as the ultimate *clin d'œil* to those who would have instantly recognised both its significance in HIV/AIDS-related visual culture and its message of defiant and vocal protest that stands as the antithesis to Sal's world of silence. As with *Le Déclin*, the trope of the medical test draws attention to the shared desires of both Sal and wider society to use short-hand terms as a means of assuaging their fears by symbolically holding at bay the virus and its devastating implications. In contrast to Claude, however, Sal's obvious physical decline forces the viewer to confront the collapse of the human body that HIV so terrifyingly represented, thus questioning the rationale that lies behind the denial of an illness whose symptoms were so clearly evident.

Sal's mixing of drugs and oral sex in a public space reinforces the relationship between debauchery and infection. However, Arcand does not seek to cast moral judgement on his protagonist's actions, but concentrates rather on inspiring empathy for his potentially HIV-positive figure. Sal's longing glances towards David across the dance floor in the later nightclub scene hint at his desire for a stable, loving relationship with the friend for whom he has probably always had admiration and affection. His hurt, wistful gaze suggests that his indulgence in casual sexual encounters could be a means of coping with loneliness and an unfulfilled desire for genuine intimacy. Compared to Claude in *Le Déclin*, the character of Sal constitutes a lonelier incarnation of what it means to be a gay man living with HIV. Claude has Diane, a close friend in whom he can confide the distressing experiences and emotions provoked by the condition. Sal, on the other hand, stands out as distinctly more isolated. David, supposedly his friend, seems to care little for anything beyond his own immediate selfish desires and his realisation of his ignorant disregard of his friend comes too late for Sal, who rebuffs his greeting in the snow-filled alley. Arcand's positioning of Sal within the film's broader picture of melancholia and disconnection sheds an important light on the potentially tragic situation of PLWHAs who, in the face of an HIV-positive diagnosis, can experience great loneliness, fear and sadness. The limited number of Sal's actual appearances on screen, coupled with David's disregard for him, means that his character, status and situation remain hidden (both physically and symbolically). Arcand's transformation of Fraser's off-stage character into a key protagonist, who yet remains estranged from the central

intrigue, poignantly reflects the social invisibility of PLWHAs and their marginalisation, even within friendship groups.

By alluding to HIV within the context of a *film noir*-inspired thriller, *Love and Human Remains* successfully evokes and examines the strong and multi-faceted sense of fear associated with sex during the 1990s, to which HIV/AIDS was a significant contributing factor. However, Arcand's use of his signature *approche historique*, whereby current societal questions and emotions are considered as parts of larger historical situations, means that his more chilling and pessimistic consideration of HIV/AIDS remains revelatory, productive and sympathetic. His careful use of characterisation allows him to create two very different embodiments of HIV and those whom it touches. A reading of Bernie as a symbol of HIV conveys the horror wreaked by the virus in a way that removes responsibility from those that carry it, placing the emphasis instead on the lethal capabilities of the virus itself. Meanwhile, the personage of Sal illustrates the feelings of vulnerability experienced by gay men at a time of much worry and uncertainty over the nature of HIV/AIDS and its emotional, physical and social impacts. *Love and Human Remains* can be read as a continuation and expansion of the consideration of HIV/AIDS in *Le Déclin* seven years earlier, portraying and explaining it as a by-product of an era defined by disconnection, narcissism, mass consumption, pessimism and materialism. Like Claude in *Le Déclin*, Sal acknowledges and questions the fears felt by wider society towards HIV and those living with (and dying from) the virus. He also represents a re-humanising of PLWHAs, providing a brief insight into the world of someone coming to terms with the emotions stirred by a HIV-positive diagnosis. However, whilst individual and social life, decadent though it may be, is still dominated and sheltered in *Le Déclin* by the veneer of affluent comfort, *Love and Human Remains* posits HIV as symptomatic of a much darker, dystopic disintegration of society. Considered exclusively in the context of the representations of HIV/AIDS provided by the two films, this shift towards a far more sinister envisioning of modern-day society could be interpreted as an accurate reflection of the time lapse between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s. The incremental growth of the epidemic and the scale of the toll on human life was far greater and more apparent in 1993 than it was in 1986. The tone of *Love and Human Remains* therefore reflects the increased

levels of mortality, grief and fear associated with HIV at a time when death rates were rising exponentially amongst affected demographics and effective combination therapy had yet to be discovered. Such an interpretation supports Arcand's reputation as a filmmaker concerned with studying the relations between individuals, societies and the prevailing issues and moods of the ages in which they find themselves.

Arcand's films, both of which received funding from the predecessors of SODEC, make allusions to HIV/AIDS via the interplay between characters and the social and moral situations in which they find themselves. In contrast, the next two filmmakers position HIV/AIDS as the principal subject and focus of their films, making consistent and explicit references to the virus and confronting the questions it raises squarely rather than obliquely. Another key difference between Arcand and the next two filmmakers, both of whom belong to a later generation of filmmakers with different backgrounds and training, lies in the audiences that their films address. Arcand's feature films have all appeared in cinemas on general release and have been aimed at a wide public in Québec and elsewhere, regardless of age, gender, class or sexual orientation. In contrast, the two films, which will now be discussed, would appear to have been produced specifically for an LGBT audience.

***Zero Patience* (John Greyson, 1993)**

John Greyson is an Anglo-Canadian filmmaker and activist living and working as an openly gay man, who has produced numerous provocative and renowned works that confront different forms of prejudice faced by homosexuals both in North America and worldwide. Released in 1993, *Zero Patience* is one of his best known and most widely distributed films. However it was not the first of Greyson's films to directly confront the AIDS crisis. Greyson was a part of the AIDS video art scene that was discussed in Chapter Three. Released in 1987, *The AIDS Epidemic* is a four-minute piece of video art that effectively uses humour and song to challenge and mock AIDS hysteria. The video revolves around Gustav Von Aschenbach, the main character of German author Thomas Mann's queer 1912 classic *Death in Venice*. In the video, Aschenbach finds himself in

contemporary Toronto surrounded by the sexual exploits of gay men. Offended by their open displays of sexuality, he succumbs to a bout of ADS, otherwise known as 'Acquired Dread of Sex'. By creating a parody of Mann's story and the AIDS crisis at large, Greyson's music video pokes fun at those who feared gay sex during the 1980s whilst simultaneously encouraging MSM to safely and positively embrace their sexuality through the use of condoms. This short piece for the video art scene was followed in 1991 by the feature-length movie *The Making of Monsters*, a musical dramatisation of the real-life murder of a gay librarian by five young men in a Toronto park in 1985, which considers the damaging effects of aggressive machismo and its associated homophobic tendencies in an entertaining and socially-relevant context that is also distinctly Canadian. Treating a homophobic killing with the light-hearted format of musical theatre may initially seem bizarre and potentially distasteful. However, Greyson successfully exploits the ironies of his formal and thematic combination to expose and critique the paradox inherent in the implicitly homoerotic qualities of the twin icons of Canadian heterosexuality, namely ice hockey and beer. These two examples highlight his commitment to a politically and socially engaged cinema that is non-conformist, comic and rooted in a local, Canadian context. They also demonstrate his penchant for dramatising and satirising pre-existing figures and events to create trenchant and imaginative social commentary.

Music and camp

Greyson's films have been recognised as examples of New Queer Cinema, a movement that emerged during the early 1990s. In her 2004 essay 'AIDS and New Queer Cinema', Monica Pearl explains how the movement, one that sought to defy a range of pre-established norms by presenting fragmented, non-narrative visions of the world inspired by irony and pastiche, is perfectly suited to representing the AIDS crisis. Linking Greyson's films with those of the English filmmaker Derek Jarman and the American filmmaker Greg Araki, she emphasises the formal and thematic embodying in their works of the chaotic shattering of lives brought about by HIV, asserting that a revolutionary epidemic required a revolutionary form of cinema to both reflect the true emotional nature of the crisis and to engage strongly and effectively with the politics of HIV/AIDS.

The argument and tone of her essay reflects the spirit of protest and revolution, both political and artistic, that defined the *raison d'être* of AIDS advocacy groups such as ACT-UP and the films belonging to the New Queer Cinema movement that sought to improve the situation of PLWHAs through radical and unconventional provocation.

Described by Greyson himself as 'the world's first AIDS musical', *Zero Patience*, embodying the provocative forms and rebellious spirit of New Queer Cinema, again turns to the musical to create a unique and eccentric portrayal of the AIDS crisis that immerses its viewers in a fantasia of socially-engaged colour, song and dance. Reprising the playful and musical anachronism of the Aschenbach short, *Zero Patience* focusses primarily upon the romantic relationship that emerges between two seemingly incompatible and impossible characters: Patient Zero, a handsome young Québécois male who happens to be a ghost, and Sir Richard Francis Burton, a real-life sexual anthropologist who became famous for his translations and anthropological studies that titillated Victorian Britain. Burton died in 1890; however, *Zero Patience* would have the viewer believe otherwise. Burton finds himself alive and well in the 1990s, working as the chief taxidermist at the fictitious Museum of Natural History in Toronto where he is tasked with the production of 'The Hall of Contagion', the museum's next big exhibit that will reveal the world's greatest epidemics through a series of dioramas, featuring AIDS as its grand finale. He thus embarks on the production of a documentary video identifying the route travelled by HIV from Africa to North America which brings him into contact with Patient Zero. In spite of their very evident differences, the two men become lovers and unlikely friends. This fantasy storyline is conveyed, developed and punctuated by a series of often outrageous songs performed by the film's various protagonists.

At first glance, the inclusion of *Zero Patience* in this thesis may appear odd. Greyson is an Anglo-Canadian, and the majority of the dialogue of the film is conducted in English. *Zero Patience* was supported financially not by SODEC but by Telefilm Canada, the federal equivalent of the provincial cultural funding body. However, the inclusion is motivated by Greyson's choice of protagonist Patient Zero, a parody of a real-life gay Québécois male named Gaëtan Dugas who gained notoriety through Randy Shilts's work *And The Band Played On*. Shilts claimed that Dugas, an Air Canada flight attendant, was one of a small

group of men to first bring HIV into North America and singled him out and portrayed him as a highly promiscuous homosexual who deliberately spread the virus, even after becoming aware of his HIV-positive status. The clinical study that established Dugas as 'Patient Zero' was subsequently found to be erroneous, but despite this corrective revelation, the allegation lastingly implicated Dugas as the supposed cause of the AIDS crisis. Many from the AIDS activist movement were highly critical of Shilts's sensationalised depiction of Dugas and his prominence in what purported to be an objective, journalistic study. Douglas Crimp's essay 'How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic' (1988: 241-44) slates Shilts's characterisation of the flight attendant as a ruse to increase sales of his book that detracted from his otherwise factual investigation of HIV, that also had the effect of thrusting a dead and defenceless Quebecker into the North American conscience as a form of sacrificial scapegoat for the AIDS crisis. Greyson's focus on Dugas, the so-called Patient Zero, a figure still persistently present in North America's AIDS narrative, is therefore highly relevant to the cinematic representation and production of Québec's AIDS narratives.

As with *The Making of Monsters*, the choice of the musical as a format for reflection on the AIDS crisis may at first seem surprising and even inappropriate. Of the four films studied in this chapter, *Zero Patience* is the most innovative in its flouting of viewers' expectations. However, according to Greyson himself, the sub-genre of the musical allowed him to create a deeply affirmative HIV/AIDS-related cultural product that counteracted the prevailing climate of melancholia for the benefit of the morale of the wider PLWHA community.¹¹⁰ The musical format permitted a radical exploration of the AIDS crisis using camp humour to convey a non-conformist, fantasy microcosm of the conflicting political and philosophical issues that is both highly entertaining and firmly grounded in the complex physical, emotional, and social realities of HIV/AIDS.¹¹¹ In her 1964 publication *Notes on 'Camp'*, Susan Sontag reflects upon the diverse

¹¹⁰ 'I think the epidemic has been so depressing, for so many of us, for so long, it was time to do something that was very strong and affirming, and fun and pleasurable, and sexy, that at the same time spoke to in particular the gay community's experience of the epidemic, what it's been like over the past ten years, but find a new way... provocative and entertaining, and innovative way to tell that story [sic]' (Networkq.lgbtv, 2013).

¹¹¹ Incidentally, the first French film to evoke the AIDS crisis, *Encore* (Paul Vecchiali, 1987) is a musical comedy (Delabre and Roth-Bettoni, 2008: 244-46), suggesting the universal appeal of music as a vibrant and expressive means of confronting HIV/AIDS.

connotations of the term. Using examples drawn from North American and European popular culture, Sontag describes camp as an amorphous sensibility that values unnatural artifice and exaggeration which converts the serious into the frivolous. People and objects (as diverse as Greta Garbo and Tiffany lamps) can embody camp if they are androgynous, theatrical and, most importantly, naïve in their failure to be serious. Though her analysis would point towards camp as being something to disdain, Sontag asserts that it is in fact 'a comic vision of the world', a quality to be enjoyed light-heartedly, not an emotion itself, but a means of confronting complex and troublesome emotions. Andrew, the narratee in Esther Valiquette's *Récit d'A*, exemplifies how camp and humour can be used as a coping mechanism by many gay men caught in the devastation of the AIDS crisis. Greyson's film is a whirlwind of colour, glamour and song that poignantly demonstrates a bold beautifying of a tragic situation, and a symbolic refusal to succumb to misery in the face of death; the form of *Zero Patience* thus embodies the spirit in which many PLWHAs faced uncertainty and mortality during the 1980s and 1990s.

Sontag's concept of camp provides a useful framework for analysis of Greyson's humorous, often parodic film and its different layers of camp humour. In the first instance, the entire premise of the film can be considered as camp. The idea of two deceased men from different eras, uniting under the roof of a museum as lovers, in order to produce a video tape about AIDS, is both farfetched and farcical. However, neither Zero nor Burton acknowledges the ridiculousness and impossibility of the situation in which they find themselves; the plot is therefore camp in its deliberate failure to acknowledge its own silliness. Additionally, the setting of *Zero Patience* also instils a strong sense of camp. Greyson's use of a predominantly bright colour palette across his sets and wardrobes contributes to the broad sense of fun and vibrancy unique to the film. Exterior and certain interior shots of the fictional Museum of Natural History are filmed at the Mississauga Civic Centre in the suburbs of Toronto. The building, completed in 1987, was hailed as a masterpiece of Canadian postmodern design, and is an architectural gift to the camp effect. Designed by the firm of Jones and Kirkland as a futuristic farm, the building's whimsical and lavish references to Canadian prairie architecture are typical of a style that valued artifice over 'substance'. The stylised barn, grain silo and clock tower, all picked out in gaudy

colours and partially-topped with glass pyramids, exaggerate traditional agricultural forms to comical effect.

Burton, Patient Zero and ACT-UP

Against this broad backdrop of nonsensical whimsy, Greyson crafts a series of fully-fledged characters that each embody a different stakeholder in the AIDS crisis and their differing perspectives on the situation. Through his mission to produce a documentary about Zero, Burton provides a caricature of the unhelpful way the AIDS crisis was approached by large sections of Western society, that deconstructs and ridicules the culture of blame that permeated reactions to the AIDS crisis and its relation with wider society. Sir Richard Francis Burton was an anthropologist whose life was defined by the desire to discover the inner workings of the human mind and the causes of human behaviour. The character of Burton as created by Greyson lives up to this reputation. His role as the museum's taxidermist renders him the human embodiment of the logic that uses science to impose a Foucauldian framework of order and control. Upon discovering the story of 'Patient Zero', Burton becomes obsessed with the tracking down of the mythical figure. He justifies his hunt by citing science, arguing that Zero could hold the key to solving and defeating HIV. However, his persistent describing of Zero as a promiscuous and murderous homosexual suggests that the rationale behind his search is emotional rather than logical, making him a symbol of those who used a diverse range of reasons to justify the perpetuating of negative portrayals and subsequent scapegoating of gay men as a homogenous, abnormal and threatening social group. Zero's status as a PLWHA is not the only characteristic that signals his otherness. In *And The Band Played On*, Shilts's various descriptions of Gaëtan Dugas make numerous references to the flight attendant's Québécois roots.¹¹² Although other descriptions make great play of his 'Canadianness', Dugas is ultimately marked as a Francophone outsider to the North American context and culture in which Shilts's investigation is principally based. In *Zero Patience*, Dugas' otherness is conveyed by the distinctive French-Canadian accent of the personage of Zero. The pigeonholing of Zero by Burton,

¹¹² 'Americans tumbled for his Québécois [sic] accent and his sensual magnetism' (Shilts, 2007: 21).

a representative figure of the colonialist ideology of the British Empire, ironically critiques and draws parallels between the invasive scrutiny of PLWHAs and the British control of North America that historically included the subjugation of the continent's Francophone peoples. The duality of Zero's otherness subtly inscribes the struggles of PLWHAs into the longer history of Canadian settlement and society, anchoring *Zero Patience* to its provincial and national contexts.

Burton's caricatural qualities are reinforced by the way in which he edits his film for the Hall of Contagion. He visits Zero's doctor, a former friend of Zero's, and Zero's mother to film a series of testimonials. All three describe Zero positively: his doctor praises his co-operation in the epidemiological studies carried out in 1982 that established the sexual nature of HIV (something that Zero's real-life equivalent Dugas also did); his friend describes Zero as a 'fun guy' who enjoyed life to the full; his mother, for her part, simply wants her dead son to be left in peace. However, Burton poses loaded questions to the three interviewees to create a portrayal of Zero that is concordant with his own pre-established agenda. Annoyed that the interviewees do not provide the testimonials he needs to support his argument, he splices the footage to create an impression of Zero that holds him accountable as the original source of AIDS in North America. This splicing is achieved crudely, with the cuts and overlaps in the audio track being very apparent. Burton's actions parody the misrepresentations of PLWHAs that were constructed by the media, whilst his blatant manipulation of the footage strongly underlines the potential for mediations of HIV/AIDS to be motivated by underlying discriminatory agendas. The social commentary implied by the character of Burton is rendered amusing by his camp appearance and behaviour. His body language and gestures are consistently grandiose and slightly effeminate in nature, his clothing theatrically Victorian, his language old-fashioned and refined and a stark contrast to Zero's vernacular English and French. Burton's comedic value is rendered greater by his earnest lack of self-awareness. Both the actions and caricatural qualities of the personage render him an incarnation of a stance against AIDS that is dated, impractical and risible.

The high camp value of Burton's character implies that those who approach HIV/AIDS as he does cannot be taken seriously. When contrasted with Burton's childish absurdities, the characters and attitudes of the film's two other

key protagonists come across as serious and legitimate. The physical appearance of Zero, the representative of the perspective and situation of a PLWHA, at first suggests he is something of a 'bad boy', with his blue jeans, white top, leather biker jacket and crew cut offering an image of an untamed, and potentially reckless, virility. However, his appearance belies his more sensitive side that emerges through his shifting, love-hate relationship with Burton. The initial friendship and intimacy that arise between them are determined in part by Zero's ghostly invisibility. Relying on the promise that Burton will find a way to bring him into the world of the living if he cooperates in the production of the museum's exhibit, Zero, though fully aware of Burton's desire to portray him as a monster, agrees to help the anthropologist curate the Hall of Contagion. This unnatural friendship successfully embodies the dynamics at play between PLWHAs and wider society. Zero's invisibility symbolises the exclusion of PLWHAs from the creation of truthful narratives that reflect the actual experiences of those living with HIV/AIDS, as well as his condemnation by society as a murderous source of disease and suffering. Concurrently, his agreement to cooperate with Burton for the sake of his reincarnation reflects his desperation to escape demonisation and ostracism.

Greyson creates characters that also communicate the perspectives of those belonging to the AIDS activist movement, to which Greyson himself belonged. This is achieved through a group of secondary characters who belong to the ACT-UP chapter local to the museum and who repeatedly clash with Burton in the curation of his exhibit. The museum manager, Doctor Placebo, orders Burton to collaborate with ACT-UP in the production of the Hall of Contagion. Burton, who voices his annoyance at being obliged to meet and collaborate with others who may disagree with his portrayal of the situation, is relieved when Placebo clarifies that the collaboration is only symbolic, and that the opinions of ACT-UP will have no bearing on the exhibit's production or message. This amusing scene parodies the real-life ignorance of certain governmental and pharmaceutical decision-makers involved in the AIDS crisis towards activists, charitable organisations and PLWHAs themselves, fighting AIDS 'on the ground'. Of all of the film filmmakers featured in this thesis, it is Greyson who most openly criticises the medical establishment for its apparent inaction and selfishness in responding to the AIDS crisis. Strongly mirroring Foucault's critique of the medical

profession, he uses song at one point to explicitly portray doctors as money-grabbing agents of surveillance and social control. Such open criticism of those who had the power to help PLWHAs manage the physical symptoms and implications of their condition demonstrates the strength of the perception held by AIDS activists and PLWHAs that the pharmaceutical industry cared more for profits than for the ill and the dying and were simply not doing enough to combat the disease. Indeed, at the meeting, the members of ACT-UP inform Burton that they are principally concerned with the sky-high cost of AIDS treatment and the enormous profits being made by the pharmaceutical companies. The group do not self-identify as victims or sufferers, labels they consider to be imposed upon PLWHAs by wider society, rather people who are very much alive and angry at the attitudes and inaction of moralising and indifferent authorities and wider society. Composed of organised, well-informed and rational individuals who seek to improve the lives of PLWHAs, the group is the antithesis to Burton's idiocy. The relationship between Burton and the ACT-UP members thus acts as a microcosm and caricature of the relationship between AIDS activists and the establishment that they perceived in real life as being indifferent to the needs of the dying and solely preoccupied with financial gain. The inclusion and prominent positioning of the ACT-UP 'brand' within *Zero Patience* allows Greyson to straddle the boundaries between fiction and reality, underscoring the relevance of the film's zany antics to the real-life causes of PLWHAs and AIDS activists and the injustices they face.

A significant member of the ACT-UP cohort is George, a bilingual elementary school teacher who gradually loses his sight due to CMV. George is a dark-skinned man; this is a significant characteristic, as he is the only non-white person in any of the films discussed in this thesis. In Greyson's film, Burton attempts to woo George into his documentary by stating that he could provide 'the Haitian perspective' on the crisis. In reply, George scoffs and storms off, leaving Burton bewildered. George's reaction indicates annoyance at Burton's assuming that his status as a PLWHA and a dark-skinned man automatically conveyed his ethnic heritage. George's role within *Zero Patience* is therefore a positive one that goes some way to representing the ethnic diversity of all those touched by the crisis, whilst the faux-pas committed by Burton mocks the real-life

phenomenon of AIDS-related racial profiling and the over-association of the virus with one particular ethnic group.

The content and purpose of the musical interludes

The camp value of the premise, setting and characters of *Zero Patience* allows the film's diverse range of protagonists to symbolically enact some of the emotional, social and political questions at play in the AIDS crisis with both hilarity and poignancy. However, the outstanding feature of *Zero Patience* is its host of musical numbers. *Zero Patience* features no less than nine songs sung by a combination of different protagonists that are pop-inspired, energetic, camp, fantastical and, above all, highly amusing. Greyson uses the performances as spaces within which the specific demands and feelings of all of the film's protagonists can be brought to life using a provocative and unorthodox means of communication that reflects the rebellious and creative spirit of AIDS activism and New Queer Cinema.¹¹³

Self-affirmation and empowerment of PLWHAs in the face of reduced sexual and personal freedoms is one of the key themes expressed through the medium of song. Two of the film's stand-out performances directly address the sexual autonomy and habits of gay men. The first occurs whilst Burton covertly films the Jet Set Baths, a gay sauna where he seeks to film gay men in their 'natural habitat'. He stumbles upon three patrons wearing nothing but towels who burst into a barbershop-style chorus and proceed to sing gaily about the pride that the sauna-goers should take in their erections. The lyrics are titillating and camp, qualities that are reinforced by the nifty and mildly risqué dance routine performed by the men as they sing.¹¹⁴ Beyond the amusing nature of the lyrics lies a meaningful message that encourages men to embrace their sexuality and celebrate the institution of bathhouses and the wonders of gay arousal. In an era

¹¹³ '[The movie musical approach was seen as daring by] the larger mainstream public. But within the ACT UP activist community, *Zero Patience* was just paying tribute in a larger form to what so many video artists, activists, performance artists, and filmmakers were already doing – taking the feistiness of ACT UP and throwing it in the face of the Reagan administration, the pharmaceutical companies, and the homophobic public' (Hays, 2007: 154).

¹¹⁴ 'When you pop a boner in the shower, hoist it like a flag for all to see [...] when you cruise the hallways of a bathhouse, adopt the smart behaviour of a vet. Every sex club has a code of manners; observe these rules of bathhouse etiquette. Saunter by, wink, fiddle with your nipple; puff your perfect pecs and swish your hips. Grab your basket cos you're going shopping, then barge right in and kiss him on the lips'.

when the mortality of AIDS led many to question any association of saunas with fun and to fear their sexual desires, such a message explicitly challenges normative views. This is not to say that the film encourages reckless behaviour; a later scene depicts Burton and Zero lying naked in one of the exhibit's dioramas in a post-coital state, surrounded by an amusing number of used condoms. *Zero Patience* thus uses song to demonstrate that gay sex can be thoroughly enjoyable and safe.

A second song between Burton and Zero confronts the taboo of anal sex. An overhead shot establishes the pair lying together in bed; the bed sheets are then pulled back to reveal that their behinds are autonomous and singing to each other. This has been accomplished via the creation of fabric, puppet-like versions of their legs and behinds, of each of them with holes conveniently cut in the right place to allow these 'mouths' room to sing. The effect achieved is ingenious, surreal and mesmerising. The mouths sing about the joys and pains of anal sex, with Burton expressing his fear of being penetrated, and Zero lamenting Burton's dread. As in the sauna, the lyrics are outrageous, imaginative and very tongue-in-cheek.¹¹⁵ However, they also evoke a number of questions relating to gay intimacy that lie at the heart of the AIDS crisis, including the dynamic of submission versus dominance and the fear of being labelled penetrable and effeminate. The lyrics do not offer answers to the questions of intimacy that they raise. However, by airing them in a way that is amusing and approachable, the performance encourages an openness to the frank discussion of such personal issues, and resists the silence to which one could succumb in the face of AIDS.

Another vibrant musical number playfully tackles the personification of HIV, simultaneously highlighting the role of storytelling as a form of protest and

¹¹⁵ Lyrics include such wild lines as 'it's an insult to the empire when I take it up the bum', 'Oedipus is weeping when my butt I do caress', 'your rectum ain't a graveyard' (a *clin d'œil* to Leo Bersani's 'Is the Rectum a Grave?' featured elsewhere in this thesis) and 'you don't like getting fucked, I haven't heard that before... One asshole to another, is the thing I most adore'.

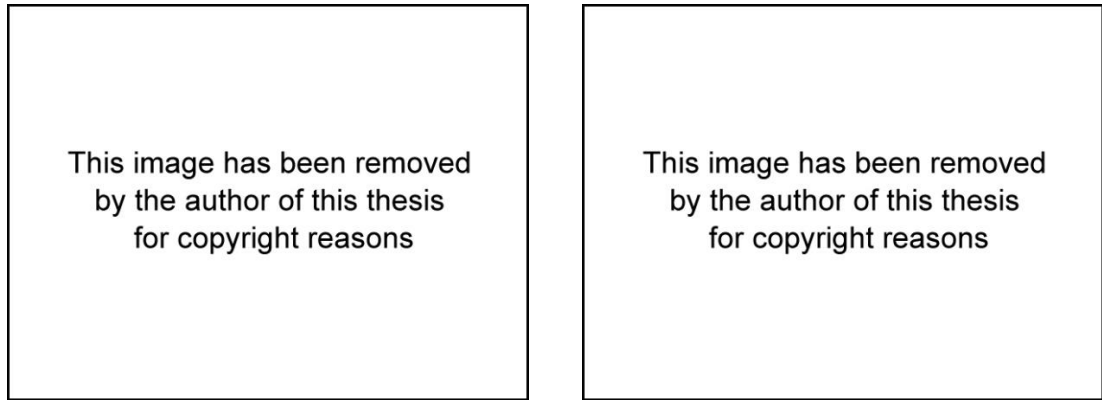


Illustration 10

defiance.¹¹⁶ Towards the end of the film, Zero discovers a sample of his blood from his days as a living human being. Placing it under a microscope, he moves in to look through the eyepiece, at which point the camera cuts to a bird's eye view of various objects floating around in a pink swimming pool. The bright and gaudy scene depicts Zero's bloodstream: red and white balloons represent blood cells, whilst T-cells, B cells and antibodies are played by people floating aimlessly in rubber rings. The components of the immune system quickly disperse when a large island floats into view, upon which is sat an umbrella-toting, softly spoken drag queen. The queen, played by AIDS activist Michael Callen, is none other than Miss HIV, an over-the-top, larger than life personification of the virus.¹¹⁷ The scene is vivid in its use of colour and imagination, and provides an amusing means of comprehending the make-up of HIV-positive blood and the microscopic biological processes at play (illustration 10). Greyson's highly unconventional and amusing representation of HIV pokes fun at the way in which the virus, a non-sentient biological phenomenon, is often characterised as a motivated, malicious murderer. The remarkable eccentricity of Greyson's vision could even be understood as a direct response to Sontag's concerns in *AIDS and its Metaphors* over the negative effects of imagery of war and conquest; at the very least, the personage of Miss HIV suggests that Greyson shared Sontag's perspective on the need to tackle the problematic use of metaphor and characterisation in the

¹¹⁶ This particular message echoes the story of Yacoub recounted by the PLWHA in *Médecins de cœur* (see Chapter Two, pp.79-80.)

¹¹⁷ Callen was a well-known member of the AIDS activist scene. In 1982, he co-wrote *How to Have Sex in an Epidemic*, a key piece of safe-sex literature. He died of AIDS-related complications in December 1993.

understanding of the AIDS crisis. Miss HIV epitomises the importance of camp positivity and humour as a means of reformulating the meanings of HIV and thereby allowing PLWHAs to regain a symbolic form of autonomy over the virus. Finally, Miss HIV breaks out into a chorus and sings a song about Scheherazade, a storybook figure who is evoked repeatedly throughout *Zero Patience*.¹¹⁸ The first mention of Scheherazade is provided at the very beginning of the film in a catchy song, performed by Zero, in which he identifies with the plight of the *Arabian Nights* heroine and emphasises the telling of stories as a crucial means of staying alive.¹¹⁹ In this regard, the message of the song is reminiscent of that of the fable used in *Médecins de cœur* as studied in Chapter Two, confirming storytelling as a framework vital to PLWHAs seeking forms of validation that reaffirm their existence and vitality. In the second instance, Miss HIV sings a variation on Zero's opening number that nuances the significance of the mythical figure.¹²⁰ The lyrics as sung by Zero suggest how PLWHAs can assert their vitality and spirit through vocal expression and a rejection of silence. The variation sung by Miss HIV, however, asks the viewer to sympathise with the plight of Scheherazade and suggests a desperation at being constantly obliged to invent new stories at a time of mourning. In its two iterations, the song problematises the relationship between PLWHAs and the creation of speech as a reaction to societal pressures, demonstrating the fine line that exists between protest and forced confession and how the vocalisation of any feelings must be enacted exclusively on the terms of PLWHAs. The connection drawn between HIV, Zero and Scheherazade highlights how, regardless of the specificities of the situation, the plight of those persecuted is one as old as time.

The songs present within *Zero Patience* act as turning points within the dramatic arcs of its key protagonists, crystallising key shifts in mood, emotion and

¹¹⁸ In 1885, Sir Richard Francis Burton translated *Arabian Nights*. In the text, the ruler of Persia, Shahryar, sentences his wife, Scheherazade, to death. She strikes a deal with her husband, obliging him to keep her alive for one more day, on the proviso that she recounts him a story every evening. By never completing the story in one night, she obliges him to delay her execution on a daily basis and to keep her alive.

¹¹⁹ 'Tell the story of my life, from zero hours to twelve am, from the good to the bad; tell the tale, save my life; a life I could've had, just like Scheherazade [...] Tell the story, clear my name, why do they need someone to blame? Wasn't evil or madness, tell the tale, save my life; a life I could've had, just like Scheherazade'.

¹²⁰ 'Tell the tale of friends we miss, a tale that's cruel and sad, weep for me Scheherazade' (my emphasis).

perspective. The principal focus of the film on questions explicitly relating to HIV/AIDS allows for a complete development of characters, their dramatic arcs and their shifting relationships with the virus. After the appearance of Miss HIV, Burton gives Zero a preview of the Hall of Contagion; disgusted by Burton's portrayal of himself and of other apparent vectors of disease, Zero leaves Burton. On the opening night of his exhibit, Burton realises the full extent of his amorous feelings towards Zero and the futility and harm caused to PLWHAs by the blame-game that his Hall of Contagion and research represent. He attempts therefore at the last minute to change the exhibit and place the blame for HIV on the green monkey, the primate thought to be at the origins of the virus's journey from Africa to North America. This realisation comes too late, however, and Doctor Placebo dictates the exhibit must proceed as planned. Fortunately, ACT-UP save the day and sabotage the exhibit, thus achieving symbolic victory over the establishment and demonstrating the triumph of compassion and logic over blame and irrationality.¹²¹ Burton attempts to use his 'eureka' moment as proof of his changed ways and to reconcile with Zero. However, acknowledging that his desire to become visible and clear his name as the cause of the AIDS crisis is motivated only by a desire to placate wider society, Zero chooses to rid himself of scrutiny, both societal and medical, to leave Burton and disappears by diving into the TV screen that stands as the centrepiece of Burton's exhibit. His departure rounds out the signification of the title of Greyson's film; just as the ACT-UP cohort had zero patience for the insufficient responses of authorities to the AIDS crisis, Patient Zero loses all patience for his being vilified as the source of AIDS. The look of understanding on Burton's face as Zero dives into the unknown suggests that he finally comprehends the impractical, superfluous and damaging nature of his relentless quest to identify the source of HIV and his lover's need to take charge of his situation and escape.

¹²¹ ACT-UP's storming of the exhibit in *Zero Patience* is reminiscent of the direct action taken at the 1989 International AIDS Conference in Montréal, where 350 real-life ACT-UP activists notably gained entry into the Palais des congrès before the opening ceremony of the conference. Their vocal protesting left organisers and guests flustered, with Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney reportedly considering leaving without delivering his speech to dignitaries and invitees (Cayouette and Rowan, 1989).

By considering HIV/AIDS in the context of a musical, Greyson both conveys a multifaceted critique of the handling of the AIDS crisis as a question of blame and injects a much-needed shot of humour and energy into the collective spirit of the PLWHA community. *Zero Patience* thus blends fact with fiction and parody to produce a politically and socially engaged romp that embodies the camp escapism used by many to confront AIDS and its impacts. The conclusion to both Burton and Zero's dramatic arcs underscores the core belief of AIDS activists such as Greyson, that only PLWHAs hold the ultimate power to define their experiences and to determine their fate and destiny, and that seeking to pin the responsibility for HIV to an identifiable source serves only to foster anger and prejudice, thus diverting attention from the real causes and scandals of the AIDS crisis.

***L'Escorte* (Denis Langlois, 1996)**

The final feature-length film to be considered in this chapter is Denis Langlois's *L'Escorte*. Langlois is a gay, independent filmmaker who, having entered the Québec film industry via the Concordia University Film Program, established his own independent film company, Castor & Pollux Productions, based in Montréal. Langlois also assists in the organisation of Montréal's LGBT film festival Image + Nation. Across his filmmaking career, Langlois has made three feature-length films and one short, all of which are fictional and explicitly gay-oriented. In 1992, he produced the short *Ma vie*, an intimate meditation on the many different lives and incarnations of a gay HIV-positive male. By the time *L'Escorte* was released, he had therefore already begun to build a reputation for producing film that focussed upon the contemporary social and personal questions faced by gay men in the age of AIDS. In 2001, five years after *L'Escorte*, he released *Danny in the Sky*, a film that explores uncertainties of sexual identity, gay culture and its values in a materialistic society through the story of a young man whose aspiration to a life of glamour leads to him becoming a stripper. *Amnesia: The James Brighton Enigma*, a film that dramatises the real-life story of an amnesiac man who is certain only of his homosexuality, followed in 2005. Langlois's canon therefore demonstrates his interest in using fictional forms to confront contemporary issues of gay identity and emotional experience from a wide range of perspectives.

L'Escorte was Langlois's first foray into feature-length film. Produced independently on a relatively minuscule budget of CAD\$ 345,000, it premiered at the 1996 Toronto International Film Festival, and was subsequently screened in Montréal, Québec City and in other Canadian metropolises including Toronto, Ottawa, Calgary and Regina. Thereafter the film went global, first in France, with releases in thirty-five cities in 1999, and then on the international LGBT film festival circuit, with screenings across Europe, Australasia and both South and North America. The film's world-wide distribution is testament to its national and international appeal amongst specifically LGBT audiences.

Romance and friendship

In *L'Escorte*, Langlois places his consideration of the AIDS crisis within the context of the romantic drama, a sub-genre that focuses upon themes of friendship, desire, romance, intimacy and fidelity. The action of the film primarily revolves around the lives of Jean-Marc and Philippe, a couple who have been together for eight years. Both are in their early-thirties, burdened by the realisation of a potentially wasted youth, an increasingly stale relationship and the need to keep their business, a restaurant, afloat. Jean-Marc and Philippe are social creatures and have a large circle of friends, with pals Nathalie and Christian playing prominent parts in the unfolding of the film's action. Christian, Philippe and Nathalie were previously known as 'le trio infernal'; however, it would appear that, having found Jean-Marc, Philippe has drifted away from the once tight friendship group, leaving Nathalie and Christian to keep the spirit of the trio alive. The couple's predictable life is disrupted by the arrival of Steve, a wild young male who purports to be an escort. Taking pity on Steve and seeking adventure, Jean-Marc and Philippe offer him a temporary place to stay whilst he recuperates from the physical and mental stress of his supposed work. During his respite stay, Steve separately seduces both Jean-Marc and Philippe, obliging the couple to re-evaluate the strength and meaning of their relationship. To complicate matters, Jean-Marc, Philippe and Steve are all intimately connected to Christian, whose status as a PLWHA underpins the dramatic thrust of the film.

L'Escorte shares certain thematic similarities with Denys Arcand's *Le Déclin*. Both films consider HIV within the confines of a sexually-intertwined social

group and interrogate the virus as a question of sex and intimacy. However, rather than allude to HIV via the fringe homosexual member of a heterosexual group and someone whose HIV status is in any case uncertain, Langlois focusses on a PLWHA as a central character whose experiences with AIDS are fully integrated into the plot of the film. As a result, all of the key protagonists are closely involved with HIV, allowing Langlois to conduct a study of human connections that are both strained and strengthened by the implications of the virus. His film thus offers a full consideration of HIV in a relational context, mirroring the significant and complex effects of the virus on real-life friendship groups. *L'Escorte* is also markedly less comedic than Arcand's film. Though light-hearted in places, it broadly examines a series of difficult personal situations and dilemmas in a more serious and delicate manner, without the sense of opulent sexual decadence that marked *Le Déclin*.

The cinematography employed by Langlois greatly strengthens the film's sense of realism. The constant moving of the frame, present even during relatively still shots, would suggest that the camera was hand-held or shoulder mounted. This ever-shifting position fosters a feeling of greater proximity between the audience and the film's protagonists and is reminiscent of the *Cinéma direct*-inspired feature films of the 1960s and 1970s. This trait is especially apparent in the film's house party scenes, with the camera moving in and around the attendees to capture a tangible sense of the physical presence and emotional charge of the scene. The film's less theatrical, 'stripped-back' feel is further underscored by the style and setting of the film. The decisions made by Langlois relating to his film's *mise-en-scène* perhaps reflect the modest budget assembled from various sources including the NFB (which funds fictional as well as documentary film), the Canadian Arts Council, SODEC and Telefilm Canada. Lighting seems natural (on occasions, external light is too bright and shadows too dark for the protagonists to be seen), the sound is synchronous and unpolished and the editing uncomplicated, whilst the internal locations appear to be real and the actors' wardrobes are casual.

The five protagonists, all linked directly or indirectly with HIV and its emotional, social and sexual repercussions, offer a range of highly distinct, provocative and memorable personalities and character types, brought into dramatic conflict with each other through their sexual intertwining. In certain

respects, Philippe and Jean-Marc can be characterised as polar opposites. Philippe is an artistic individual, whose sensitivity, constant fretting and indecision make him something of a wet blanket. In contrast, Jean-Marc is macho, hot-headed and easily irritated. These traits are reflected by their respective appearances, Philippe's waifish physique and floppy hair suggesting a degree of femininity, whilst Jean-Marc's crew cut, lumberjack shirts and muscular build reinforce his position as the dominant partner in the relationship. The strong contrast between the couple suggests from the outset that their pairing is potentially not a match made in heaven, whilst the precarious situation of their restaurant heightens the tension between them. This fraught atmosphere sets the perfect stage for the arrival of Steve, a flirtatious and wayward young man who seduces Philippe with his love of art and Jean-Marc with his charm and willingness to submit sexually. Steve thus acts as a source of fantasy and conflict, providing the ultimate test of the stability of Philippe and Jean-Marc's relationship. Christian, meanwhile, a friend and one-time lover of Philippe, shares many affinities with his former partner; he is quiet, reflective and enjoys painting and the opportunities for escapism that it presents. Their relative similarities and close friendship hint that Philippe might in fact be better off with Christian and not Jean-Marc. The final protagonist Nathalie, a close friend of both Philippe and Christian, is even more anxiety-prone than Philippe and appears to be permanently on the edge of a nervous breakdown. She is, however, extremely loyal, playing the role of Christian's confidante with care and attention. The critical *dénouement* of *L'Escorte* comes from the uncovering of the relationship between Christian and Steve. Towards the end of the film, it is discovered that Steve is not the escort that he claims to be, but is in fact a student and the partner of Christian. Having learnt of his lover's HIV-positive status, he was overcome by fear and fled his partner; ironically, Steve, the escort, was unable, initially at least, to escort Christian through his illness.

Christian

It is against this backdrop of infidelity, shifting relationships and emotional uncertainty that Christian's story as a PLWHA unfolds. From the very outset of the film, Langlois's depiction of Christian nuances and challenges common

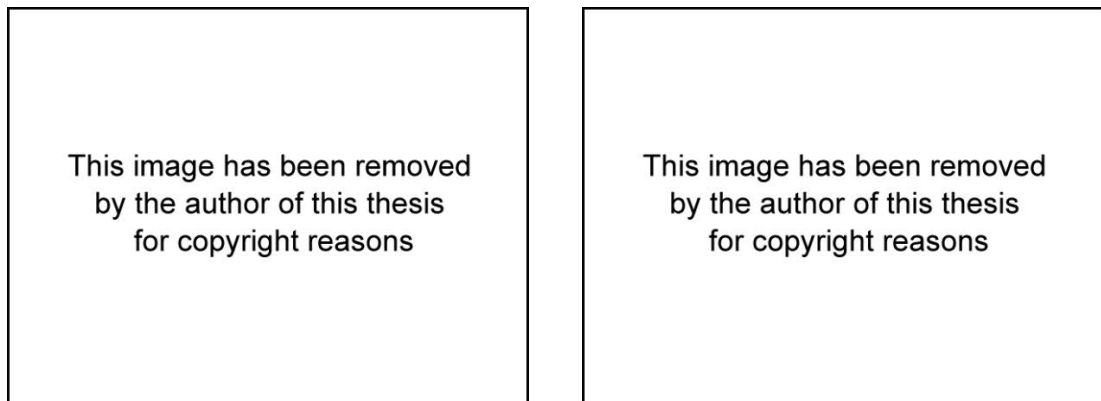


Illustration 11

stereotypes of gay male PLWHAs. Christian is a gay man; however, this fact is not necessarily conveyed by appearance, actions and mannerisms. He is a regular-looking young male, who dresses and acts un-flamboyantly. The film's dialogue does allude to his 'busy' past on the gay scene; however, he is not explicitly depicted engaging in any risqué sexual activities that could suggest the source of his HIV-positive status. Christian's character and behaviour thus do not encourage the consideration of HIV as an issue principally pertaining to morality and lifestyle.

Christian's relationship with his condition passes through a series of emotional stages. In an early scene with Nathalie, he expresses both his desire to escape and his fear of disclosing his positive status to others, and proposes a voyage around the world as a means of clearing his mind of the confusion that HIV has caused him. The desperation of Christian's desire to escape his situation is underlined in a later scene with Philippe. Still convinced of the cathartic promise of a journey, he informs his friend of his ambitious travel itinerary in an uncharacteristically excited and erratic manner. The pair discuss the plans they had when they were twenty, an age summarised by Christian as one when all in life seemed possible. It would appear that the urgency inherent in Christian's diagnosis has obliged him to evaluate the achievements of his life so far, an evaluation that appears to leave him still in need of fulfilment. An alternative form of escape and a different type of 'journey' is suggested by Nathalie, who encourages Christian to rediscover his former love of painting and work through his feelings via the creation of art. Later scenes demonstrate that he has taken up Nathalie's suggestion. In the first, he is seen hesitantly drawing a series of

random lines in charcoal on a canvas, that come finally together as an ever-increasing, all-engulfing spiral. A simple interpretation of the drawing would suggest Christian's feelings of loss, uncertainty and lack of control. A later scene shows him once more at the easel, using paint to create an abstract and vivid image of a male body pierced by arrows and, bleeding from multiple points across its torso, which resembles the many depictions of the Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian. The bright colours used by Christian jar with the violence of the scene, provoking feelings of vulnerability, empathy and dismay at the situation of the painting's subject (illustration 11). Christian's choice of Saint Sebastian, a gay icon, draws a strong parallel between the iconic martyr, Christian's own emotional and physical suffering and that of all PLWHAs. If his artwork is to be interpreted as a reflection of his feelings in relation to his status, the changes between the two canvasses demonstrate a form of progress, showing Christian's gradually increasing understanding of his feelings towards his status and its potential implications. Through art, Christian can articulate and define the nature of his fears and achieve a form of control over his mixed emotions and difficult situation.

The cathartic properties of painting have been extolled by prominent thinkers as a means of facing up to the significance of the AIDS crisis. In 1991, Susan Sontag collaborated with British artist Howard Hodgkin to publish *The Way We Live Now*. The book marries word and art to create a visually engaging and provocative reflection of the AIDS crisis as experienced by an individual living in New York. The verbal component of *The Way We Live Now* was written by Sontag in 1986 as a short story that appeared in *The New Yorker* publication. Mimicking a stream of consciousness, the text articulates the different forms of concern felt by the friends of a fictional PLWHA. The form and content of the text conveys their collective denial of the seriousness of their friend's condition, and the jovial façade they maintain for his sake. The 1991 version of the text is interspersed with a quintet of pull-out paintings created by Hodgkin, embracing a series of abstract colourful designs, which can be interpreted as visualisations of the different emotions experienced by the protagonists at different points throughout the text. The works of art featured in both Sontag's text and Langlois's film demonstrate the creative potential of visual art to help PLWHAs better

understand the implications and emotional experiences of their HIV-positive status.¹²²

The final stage of Christian's emotional journey is conveyed to the other protagonists via a letter. The last time Christian is depicted in Montréal, he is seen reconciling with Steve and leaving on his planned trip accompanied by his lover. The film closes with Jean-Marc, Philippe, Philippe's mother and Nathalie gathered at the restaurant whose future they have secured. Philippe and Jean-Marc seem to be working through their differences, suggesting that their shared drama with Steve acted as a wake-up call that jolted them into caring for their relationship rather than indulging in selfish pursuits. Finally, Philippe receives a letter from Christian; after a moment of hesitation, he reads it aloud to the group. As he begins to read, the camera cuts from the restaurant interior to a fantasy beach scene. Christian, dressed in summer holiday attire, looks directly into the camera and addresses the viewer by reading aloud his own letter.¹²³ His words suggest a number of developments in his feelings towards his condition. He has moved beyond a state of confusion and discovered a sense of serenity afforded by the exploration of life's possibilities and the appreciation of the present moment. His perspective on his status has shifted in such a way as to give him authority over his condition. These changes are reflected in his physical appearance and demeanour; in contrast to the agitation of his previous appearances, he seems relaxed and content, whilst the confident and clear delivery of his letter at the beach stands in contrast to his previous tendency to mumble. Furthermore, the *mise-en-scène* of Christian's monologue gives greater importance and impact to his words. His speaking to the camera is intimate and compelling, whilst the sound of waves heard in the background provides a serene backdrop against which his newfound feelings and the clarity with which they are

¹²² Hodgkin's use of colour is reminiscent of Derek Jarman's use of shades in *Chroma*, once more underscoring their explanatory and cathartic potential. In the case of Sontag, the paintings help to clarify and intensify the feelings expressed by the protagonists of her text, in turn better relaying the emotions to the reader. In the case of Langlois, art is seen directly assisting a PLWHA in realising the significance of his condition and in creating a way forward for Christian to move beyond the trauma of his diagnosis.

¹²³ 'Philippe, tu me disais comment à vingt ans tout était possible. C'est plus vrai pour moi, plus de la même façon en tout cas. Il est devenu tellement léger, le temps, maintenant, il est devenu infini. Avant, la vie était un fardeau de choses à faire et de finalités à donner. Maintenant, il n'est que maintenant la vie, et je dois explorer ce que ça veut dire. En m'éloignant de toi, je me suis détaché du miroir, et le paysage entier m'est enfin apparu.'

expressed can audibly sparkle. Christian's dramatic arc is defined by a relentless desire to communicate through a variety of media, the spoken word, painting, and the writing of the letter, as a means of seeking relief. His letter leaves his ultimate fate unclear. However, his emotional journey, one that passes through stages of denial and fear towards acceptance and clarity, demonstrates that an HIV-positive diagnosis and its potential ramifications can be confronted and understood in ways that ultimately empower PLWHAs.

Christian's departure from the film is also significant; like Sal in *Love and Human Remains*, and Zero in *Zero Patience*, he disappears into the ether, leaving the world of the other protagonists behind to pass into a new and unknown space. His departure may signal his imminent or eventual death, with his newfound sense of inner peace and contentment allowing him to leave the land of the living on a high note. Alternatively, it may imply that, having confronted his emotions and inner demons, he has emerged triumphantly in a new environment, ready to begin a new phase of his life, whatever it may hold. In either case, the recurrence of the transition motif across three of the four films featured in this chapter demonstrates how filmmakers can use the unique visual and kinetic qualities of film to poignantly and symbolically express the evolving nature of the relationship between PLWHAs, HIV, life and death.

Steve, Nathalie, Philippe and Jean-Marc

In addition to shedding light on the emotional experiences of a PLWHA, *L'Escorte* also highlights the ways in which HIV can touch those who are not HIV-positive. The involvement of all of the film's key protagonists in Christian's story evokes a broad range of emotional experiences related to HIV, including issues of solidarity, isolation, disclosure, responsibility, denial, flight, fear, grief, love, sex, life and death in both individual and interpersonal settings. Upon the film's release, Langlois gave an interview to *Fugues* in which he revealed that *L'Escorte* had been inspired by his real-life friend hiding his HIV-positive status from him. Explaining the power of HIV to instantly provoke widespread uncertainty throughout social groups, he expresses his belief in love and friendship as an

appropriate antidote to the chaos and sadness caused by the virus.¹²⁴ By considering the wider ramifications of HIV from a range of different perspectives, *L'Escorte* fosters an approach to the AIDS crisis that moves beyond the solitary figure of a PLWHA towards a collective understanding of the virus that is sensitive to the different connections (be they emotional, physical, sexual, negative or positive) that bind PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs together.

Steve is the character most closely implicated in Christian's experience as a PLWHA. His initial abandonment of his partner is indicative of the inner turmoil that can arise when the fear of infection collides with feelings of love and attachment; he feels panic at the prospect of Christian's status, yet appears to feel remorse and guilt for not supporting his lover in his time of need. Their relationship honestly depicts the issues that serodiscordant couples may face in negotiating the potential difficulties posed by their situation. As the only other person to whom Christian discloses his seropositive condition, Nathalie too, albeit in a less immediate fashion, feels the pressure of responsibility borne by those in whom PLWHAs confide. Philippe, in contrast, is implicated in Christian's storyline through his neglect of his friend. Wrapped up in his amorous liaison with Steve, Philippe fails to notice the shift in Christian's mood that reflects his difficult situation, until a close-up underscores his sudden guilt-ridden realisation of his negligence. Jean-Marc is also involved, in a similar manner, in Christian's storyline. At the party at which Steve makes his entrance, Nathalie announces her plan to host a commemorative party for the death of Marco, another member of the film's friendship circle who has recently died from AIDS. Jean-Marc is vocal in his disapproval of Natalie's proposed party, even going so far as to brashly propose a toast to the 'the survivors', a gesture that suggests a hierarchy amongst gay men that assigns greater moral and social credibility to those who do not succumb to AIDS than to those who do. The motivations for Jean-Marc's offensive bravado are suggested in a later domestic fireside scene. When he and Philippe eventually become aware of Christian's HIV status, Jean-Marc

¹²⁴ 'Avec le Sida, on ne peut plus être sûr de rien... Et on en vient inmanquablement à se demander « À qui le diriez-vous si vous étiez atteint? » Les personnages du film courent dans tous les sens parce qu'ils sont soudainement confrontés à la fragilité de la vie. Dans nos sociétés, où la mort est tenue à l'écart et où la possibilité d'apparition d'autres maladies semblables ou pires ont changé la façon de voir la vie, l'amour et l'amitié prennent beaucoup de place' (Lafontaine, 1996: 89-90).

unexpectedly breaks down over the spectre of mortality hanging over the group and proceeds to sob in the arms of his partner. The scene suggests the depth of Jean-Marc's real feelings in relation to the friendship group's situation, including the fear of death and grief over the loss of friends. His character thus demonstrates the use of bravado as a mask to hide one's actual feelings of fear and vulnerability, thus raising the themes of denial and performance and underlining the film's realism in confronting the mortal threat posed by HIV/AIDS.

By considering HIV in the context of a romantic drama, *L'Escorte* contemplates how the emotions provoked by the virus play out within intertwined friendship groups as they often do in reality. By placing Christian firmly at the forefront of the film's action, Langlois creates a fully-fledged dramatic arc that provides insight into the experiences and potential trajectory of a PLWHA coming to terms with their condition. Because of the protagonists' interconnectedness, Langlois also sheds light on the shifting feelings of those experiencing HIV vicariously, demonstrating how the virus can touch PLWHAs as well as non-PLWHAs and can only be fully confronted using a collective approach.

This thesis has demonstrated how, as the AIDS crisis unfolded, many sought to identify and employ any means possible of physically and symbolically halting the spread of HIV. In response, prominent and vocal members of gay populations exhorted the frank and open discussion of safer sex practices and the use of condoms as vital to the continuing survival of gay men. Simon Watney calls on gay men to embrace condoms as a tool to continue celebrating the affirmative joys unique to gay sex and thus to rebel against the morbid AIDS narratives imposed on gay men by wider society.¹²⁵ In a similar fashion, Douglas Crimp implores gay men not to fear sex but to carry on indulging (safely) in its manifold

¹²⁵ 'We must not collude with the anti-sex lobby all around us, for it is precisely their equation of sex with AIDS which stands to construct a new contagion theory of homosexuality which is every bit as tenacious as that which has taken us the better part of a century to successfully dismantle [...] to expect any one, or any group of people, completely to renounce desire is simply to invite feelings of guilt and low self-esteem [...] we so urgently need to enlarge and expand our sense of the sexual, in order to incorporate condoms as new stage props into the theatre of our desiring fantasies' (Watney, 1987: 132-33).

opportunities for pleasure as a way of surviving societal ostracisation.¹²⁶ Both men's critiques point towards the absolute need to render condoms visible to gay audiences through visual materials and depictions, as well as the advantages to be gained from doing so, including the dismantling of barriers of fear and silence, the setting of 'good examples' for gay men to follow, the increase of condoms' discussion and uptake and the liberation of gay men from the climate of fear in which they existed. It is noteworthy that the two films that depict condoms featured in this corpus are both feature films. A brief consideration of the relationship between visual representations of condoms and all four films studied in this chapter can draw a range of revealing conclusions relating to the films and their target audiences.

In 1986, condoms do not feature once in *Le Déclin*, with the protagonist's sexual affairs seemingly being conducted without the precautions that the contemporary climate of HIV obliged. However, with HIV/AIDS by no means the central focus of *Le Déclin*, the lack of explicit references to safer sex should not be interpreted as a wilful omission. Moving forward seven years to 1993, a reference to condoms can be observed in *Love and Human Remains*. In bed with one of her suitors, Candy asks her partner whether he has any protection, however a rummage in his bedside table confirms that his supplies have run out. This initially appears to put an end to the moment; yet, on the promise that the male does not have HIV, the pair pick up where they left off. The moment demonstrates how, in the heat of the moment, sexual urges can overcome rationality. The fact that Arcand raises the issue of condoms in the context of a heterosexual encounter is indicative of his wish to consider HIV not as a minority issue but as a universal concern. The representations of condoms that feature in the two LGBT-specific films differ greatly. *Zero Patience* features a scene of explicit sexual encounter between Zero and Burton in one of the dioramas in the Hall of Contagion, which fades out to reveal the pair, the following morning, surrounded by a comical number of condoms strewn all over the floor. In contrast to *Love and Human Remains*, Greyson uses humour to posit the condom not as a mood-killing necessity, but as an integrated part of sexual enjoyment (as

¹²⁶ 'We were able to invent safe sex because we have always known that sex is not, in an epidemic or not, limited to penetrative sex [...] *it is our promiscuity that will save us*' (Crimp, 1988: 253, italics in original).

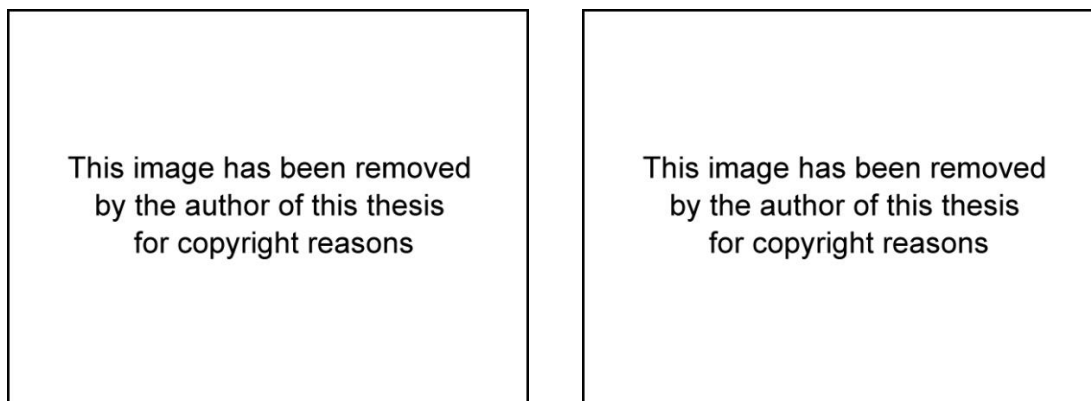


Illustration 12

suggested by their sheer number). In *L'Escorte*, condoms are present in the encounter between Steve and Jean-Marc. As foreplay progresses, Steve reaches into his jeans on the floor to pull out a packet. This gesture is exaggerated by the camera, which follows Steve's arm down to the floor and remains focussed on his rummaging. With Steve's back to the camera, he then rolls the condom onto Jean-Marc; the pair then proceed to have sex. As did Greyson, Langlois demonstrates (though in an altogether more explicit manner) how condoms can easily be assimilated into sex and contribute to the erotic charge of the moment (illustration 12). The depictions of condoms in the two LGBT-specific films are representative of the recurring trope of the 'good example', suggesting that both Greyson and Langlois, two gay filmmakers, felt a need to squarely and positively address condoms and their use as a means of sending their LGBT audiences a call to action to combat HIV by practising safer sex. Their inclusion also highlights the many roles that fictional film can play, acting as a source of public information as well as providing entertainment, and suggests that, when directed to smaller, 'invested' audiences, fictional film can speak effectively to communities in times of hardship and confusion.

The four filmmakers studied in this chapter have exploited a range of sub-genres and their inherent conventions to evoke and reflect upon HIV/AIDS from a range of perspectives, through a host of varied, provocative and engaging characters with whom the viewer can identify or disagree, and storylines which can compel audience attention.

Arcand's use of his signature *approche historique* allows both *Le Déclin* and *Love and Human Remains* to consider the virus as a symbol of its era. Using the sub-genre of the sex comedy to critique the hedonistic selfishness and moral disengagement of Québec's contemporary elite, *Le Déclin* also includes a brief yet sympathetic portrayal of a presumed PLWHA confronting the fear posed by HIV to his life and wellbeing. *Love and Human Remains*, in the different format of the thriller, similarly positions the virus as indicative of the disaffection and disintegration of society. Through Sal, Arcand tells a succinct yet touching story of a PLWHA coming to terms with both the fear and social isolation that the virus can cause. By evoking some of the stereotypical traits of homosexuals and PLWHAs, both Claude and Sal are instantly recognisable to mainstream audiences as gay men. However, it is the obviousness of their situations and characters that allows Arcand to then quickly and effectively nuance their personages through further character and plot development. This in turn obliges his general-public audiences to interrogate their own likely varied (and potentially negative) stances towards PLWHAs and AIDS.

In contrast, by focussing squarely on HIV both thematically and through central protagonists, both *Zero Patience* and *L'Escorte* enact more thorough interrogations of the AIDS crisis that appeal to their LGBT-specific audiences, ones who, in relation to HIV, would have been more knowledgeable and familiar with the topics at hand than their general public counterparts. In the case of *Zero Patience*, the sub-genre of the musical allows Greyson to create a feature film that conveys an alternative, defiant and optimistic vision of the AIDS crisis and strongly embodies the spirit of protest and rebellion that defined the AIDS activist movement. Through Burton, Zero and the members of ACT-UP, Greyson tells a host of detailed and interlaced stories that evoke a range of complex issues related to the crisis, including discrimination, stereotyping, exclusion, sex, self-acceptance and performativity.

Finally, the use of the sub-genre of the romantic drama allows Langlois to examine the intricacy of the impacts of HIV on a tightly-knit friendship group, specifically showing the far-reaching social implications of the virus and the need to confront it pluralistically. Through Christian, Langlois tells the story of a PLWHA who overcomes the emotional turmoil of his seropositivity to eventually discover a sense of contentment and equilibrium with the world, a personal tale resonating

with many members of the film's audience. By affording their PLWHA personages principal protagonist status, both Greyson and Langlois create fully-fledged characters who challenge stereotypical representations attached to PLWHAs and whose resolved story arcs allow them to grow and achieve catharsis through the honest and open consideration of their status and situation. The different approaches of the four films suggest that filmmakers seeking to address LGBT audiences felt more comfortable fully confronting HIV (or perhaps more obligated to do so) than did filmmakers seeking to address wider, more varied audiences. However, the limited size of the corpus renders this suggestion far from conclusive. None of the films fit neatly within the framework of the tearjerker as proposed by Waugh, showing that a full cinematic consideration of the ramifications of HIV necessitates multiple frameworks of understanding.

In terms of the films' relationships with the broader trends of Québec fictional film, all four films interact with the province's longstanding preoccupations with morality and sexuality. In particular, they all negotiate the breaking of sexual taboos, analysing the specificities of the relationship between HIV and contemporary questions of sex and intimacy. Also reflecting the desire of Québec cinema to investigate the lives of its province's subcultures, all four films demonstrate a willingness to engage positively with questions of marginality, conducting sympathetic and detailed studies of PLWHAs who belong to one or more societal minorities. In matters of form and technique, the four films display a range of nuanced relationships with *le réel*; by borrowing techniques from the world of *Cinéma direct*, *L'Escorte* conducts its consideration of HIV through a naturalistic lens. In contrast, the other three films' use of the more sophisticated or exaggerated techniques of their chosen sub-genres places their considerations of the virus in more reflective, dramatic and fantastic (yet no less revealing) contexts. What unites the four films is their ability to tell stories relating to the AIDS crisis that transcend linguistic and national boundaries. *Le Déclin* and *L'Escorte* achieved global recognition in their respective *milieux*, bringing Francophone, Québec-based interactions with HIV to audiences across the world. In spite of their English-language origins, both *Love and Human Remains* and *Zero Patience* were able to bring rich and engaging mediations on HIV/AIDS to audiences in Québec that were relevant to their own provincial experiences of the virus. These international exchanges demonstrate Québec's ability to

appreciate and create current, outward-looking forms of fictional film and its position as an interconnected hub for HIV/AIDS-related film, LGBT-specific or otherwise, that is part of a global web of cultural productivity reflecting on the AIDS crisis in all the world's national and regional contexts. The four films also demonstrate the vital financial support lent by both provincial and federal creative funding agencies and therefore their willingness to support the creation and distribution of diverse forms of cinematic interactions with HIV/AIDS as it was experienced in Québec and Canada.

Conclusion

This thesis has had a dual aim. It has sought to identify to what extent Québec's cinematic responses to HIV/AIDS in the pre-1996 era were specific to the province and interlinked with internal questions of cultural and national identity. Conversely, it has considered in what sense the case of Québec has provided a set of representations of the epidemic that has captured with particular intensity a much wider, global phenomenon, thus serving as a microcosm of the myriad questions of fear, identity, societal cohesion, politics and health integral to the AIDS crisis. The emergence of HIV onto the world stage caused great human suffering and provoked panic on a global scale. The mysterious and lethal nature of the virus, coupled with the severity and variety of ailments that it permitted and the demographics it touched, produced reactions from across the world that were not only medical, political and deeply personal, but also artistic. These responses demonstrate the human need to *represent* in order to better understand the seemingly unfathomable, but also to explore complex and troubling emotions, to re-assert agency over threatening phenomena, to achieve differing degrees and forms of catharsis, to communicate and congregate with others, and to transcend the purely contingent facts of existence in favour of developing more spiritual understandings of the relationship between the self and other.

This thesis has established that, on the one hand, Québec's cinematic responses to HIV/AIDS were nationally specific. Prior to the emergence of the virus, the province already had a strong history of using educational film: first by the Catholic Church to reinforce the importance of agrarian life and conservative values; later by the NFB who, responding to the feature-film might of Hollywood, developed the potential of educational film into the documentary to allow filmmakers to enact in-depth and revealing studies of Canadian and Québécois people and society. These educational films explored the complex identities of Canadians and Quebeckers and made socio-political interventions by giving a voice to marginalised sections of the population. This particular reflex extended across the three genres of film discussed here: documentary, testimonial film and fictional feature film. The context was thus supportive to the use of film to

interrogate HIV/AIDS in its local contemporary contexts, materially (including the development of new, lightweight cinematic technologies), institutionally (notably the role of the NFB as a training ground for new politically- and socially-minded filmmakers) and culturally (since this was a society engaged both in the production and consumption of educational, informative cinema relating to contemporary questions of self and community).

Québec's distinct historical sense of itself as a beleaguered minority potentially provided a dual model for its treatment of PLWHAs. On the one hand, renewed feelings of vulnerability and mistrust after the upheavals of *la Révolution tranquille*, the drama of the referendum in 1980 and the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution (without Québec's agreement) in 1982, arguably mapped reactive, insular desires for stability and safety onto its collective responses to HIV/AIDS. Such responses inspired by fear and distress were particularly apparent in the sometimes sensationalist reporting of Québec's print media. In contrast, the history of Québec cinema as a vehicle for cultural and national self-affirmation provided an institutional framework geared to a more thoughtful and sensitive response to the AIDS crisis, both in terms of lived experience and of external threat, thus aligning it with the affirmative approach of the Anglophone HIV/AIDS-related corpus as observed by Thomas Waugh. What film production from 1986 to 1996 demonstrates is film's capacity both to document and analyse the AIDS crisis in a factual sense, and to represent and explore universal forms of emotional trauma. Exploiting film's potential for mimetic transparency, documentaries enacted studies of the factual elements of HIV as it was experienced in Québec by PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs alike. However, the interpolation of more subjective visual material also allowed these films unique opportunities to explore some of the more subjective and emotional aspects of the AIDS crisis, thus investing their factual explorations with an intensified sense of depth and human relevance. Further to film's ability to transpose emotions visually and aurally through the manipulation of technique, mise-en-scène and editing, testimonial film enabled HIV-positive filmmakers to work through their experiences and emotions, literally and metaphorically, and create discursive communities that afforded both themselves and their audiences the opportunity to disclose, understand and heal using a medium that transcribed and amplified

the psychological impact of these processes. Finally, employing cinema's capacity to address and engage with contemporary societal questions through the popular process of storytelling, feature film offered filmmakers the narrative frameworks in which to evoke and relate, to varying degrees, some of the emotional, social and historical significations of HIV to mass audiences, thus becoming vital talking points in society-wide conversations about HIV, or watershed moments in the cultural psyche of adversely affected demographics.

Whilst the three film types broadly prioritise their primary motivations as described above, a degree of overlap can be observed, with all three genres borrowing elements of each other's defining techniques and treatments of protagonists and subject matter, suggesting that a blend of approaches to the cinematic mediation of HIV is both possible and beneficial to the creation of well-rounded, engaging and pertinent reflections. A degree of overlap can also be observed in the intended audiences of the three film genres. In such a cine-literate society as Québec and particularly Montréal, with its high student, intellectual, and LGBT populations, the audiences for each type of film were interchangeable, with all three capable of appealing to a diverse range of interested and engaged patrons and uniting viewers to gather, witness, learn and share, regardless of gender, sexuality or HIV-status. Québec's impressive contribution to the international corpus of HIV/AIDS-related film, coupled with its enthusiasm to screen international examples of the genre at festivals such as Image + Nation, cements the province's position within a global network of HIV/AIDS-related film production, consumption and exchange.

In the post-1996 era, cinema has remained a key component of Québec's cultural responses to HIV/AIDS. In a relatively short time, the introduction and dissemination of combination therapy across the Western world have rendered HIV/AIDS, a previously lethal condition, a chronic yet manageable illness. Access to life-saving treatment has fundamentally redefined the attitudes of PLWHAs towards their own seropositivity, greatly relieving them of the mortal threat posed by the virus. However, in spite of these changes, societal attitudes towards PLWHAs have been slow to change. Today, PLWHAs can face familial, societal, professional and medical discrimination and judgement. The criminalisation of HIV non-disclosure decreed by the Supreme Court of Canada in 1998, obliging

PLWHAs to disclose their status before any form of sexual intercourse deemed by the Court to be 'of high risk' or face prosecution, is particularly symbolic of the different forms of social control, both overt and covert, to which PLWHAs are still subjected. Film therefore is still vital in providing PLWHAs with a means of coming to terms with their condition and achieving catharsis. Since 1996, the use of the three genres of film studied in this thesis has varied. After *Quand l'amour est gai*, the NFB has produced no further Francophone documentaries that touch upon the AIDS crisis, whether directly or tangentially. This abandoning of HIV as a subject of documentary study could be indicative of a drop in interest in the subject matter, of a lack of funding, or of the Board's belief that the questions raised by the virus have been sufficiently dealt with. In terms of feature films, a sustained use of Arcand's tangential approach to referencing AIDS within broader, historical and societal contexts can be observed. Québec director Jean-Marc Vallée has created two feature films that touch upon HIV. *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (2005) recounts the coming-of-age tale of Zachary, a young gay Quebecker grappling with his sexuality in the context of his large, Catholic family and the social upheaval of mid- to late-twentieth century Québec. The film's depictions of Zachary in his mid-twenties during the 1980s make subtle suggestions that place his health in doubt, thus mirroring the use of allusion and symbolism by Denys Arcand in *Le Déclin*. Vallée has also directed *Dallas Buyers Club* (2013), an English-language film starring Matthew McConaughey. Based on a true story, it tells the tale of a macho, heterosexual cowboy in 1980s Texas who, following a surprise HIV-positive diagnosis, organises a drug-smuggling operation to sell medication to PLWHAs. Meanwhile, Daniel Roby released *Funkytown* (2011) a multi-plot ensemble drama set during the waning years of Montréal's disco scene. Through the character of Jonathan Aaronson, a flamboyant and promiscuous DJ, Roby makes a passing reference to HIV that posits the virus as a symbol of the era's moral decay and also of the economic decline of Montréal that occurred in the late-1970s and into the 1980s. These twenty-first-century films place considerations of HIV firmly in the past, historicising HIV as an issue of an era now over; this shift raises complex questions relating to the present position of HIV as a societal concern and the potential ignorance on the part of non-PLWHAs of current experiences of the virus.

Perhaps the most significant shift to have occurred in the post-1996 era, and to exert huge changes on the approaches used by filmmakers seeking to reflect on the AIDS crisis, is the explosion in the development and proliferation of digital technology and platforms. Specifically, film and video have given way to digital recording, a medium that renders the processes of filming, editing and distribution both simpler and more accessible than ever before, not only to trained filmmakers, but also to the general public. As a result of this increasing democratisation of the medium, new groups have been able to exploit the cathartic potential of film, allowing more PLWHAs the opportunity to reflect cinematically on their HIV-positive status and create testimonial works. In Montréal, Cultures du témoignage is a social and creative project that seeks to facilitate, document and study the experiences of those who have been stigmatised and isolated for their sexual roles and identities, including sex workers, trans people and PLWHAs. In 2012, the organisation released *VIHSIBILITÉ (2000-2012)*, a compilation of seventeen contemporary testimonial films (both Francophone and Anglophone), including short films and excerpts of longer works, that reflect on the experiences of PLWHAs in an era in which the medical and social significance of the virus has shifted significantly. Released in a DVD format, some of the films are also available to view online for free, bringing HIV/AIDS-related film to new audiences. Meanwhile, the NFB's current lack of activity should not be interpreted as an abandonment of the documentary form as a tool for the investigation of HIV and its place in contemporary Québec society. On the contrary, another film project with great online presence is *Epopée.me*, a series of testimonial documentaries filmed between 2010 and 2012 by cinema action group Épopée. These films, all fully available to view exclusively online, tell the stories of marginalised people existing on the fringes of Québec society on Montréal's skid row. Certain films explore the lives of those living with HIV, including a homeless PLWHA who highlights the difficulties and precariousness of living with HIV on the streets, a new situation provoked by the developments made in HIV treatment. Youtube has also played an important part in increasing the reach and influence of Québec's HIV/AIDS-related film. The Coalition des organismes communautaires québécois de lutte contre le sida (COCQ-SIDA) is a Montréal-based charity that seeks to empower PLWHAs to play a greater part in city- and province-wide efforts to combat HIV and its stigma.

The charity also lobbies the Québec government to defend and promote the interests of the province's PLWHAs. COCQ-SIDA hosts a range of HIV/AIDS-related videos on its Youtube page; of particular note are those created since 2012 under the banner of a project entitled *C'est le sida qu'il faut exclure, pas les séropositifs*. These testimonial shorts feature PLWHAs discussing their HIV-positive status and their place in contemporary society, encouraging viewers to reconsider their perceptions of the virus and those it touches. The charity's use of the video-streaming service as a host-site allows their videos to be shared across social media platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, permitting their work and messages to reach a new generation of Quebeckers whose lives are increasingly influenced by such digital and interconnected methods of communication. These three examples are suggestive of the greater democratisation of film as a medium for witnessing and reflection that migration towards digital media and platforms has enabled.

This thesis has provided a comprehensive overview of the relationship between Québec and HIV/AIDS, as reflected, mediated and transformed by the medium of cinema from 1986 to 1996. It has examined the significant role of Québec film in this decade as the AIDS crisis unfolded and took hold and shown how the documentary and artistic interventions and interactions of film played a crucial role in demystifying populist and sensationalist conceptions of HIV and in promoting more measured and sensitive responses to the illness and all those, PLWHAs and non-PLWHAs alike, affected by it. Building upon this work, a next stage would be a study of the role of the digital media in the representation and questioning of HIV/AIDS post-1996, and of its impacts on the experiences of individual PLWHAs, on their family and friendship groups, on social or professional organisations and on the public at large. Complementing the present thesis, an evolving picture could thus be traced of Québec's use of film in the private and public questioning of HIV/AIDS from the emergence of the illness right up to the present day.

Filmography

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Appendices

Appendix I: Transcript of interview with Louis Dionne, 14 August 2013

(A – Andrew)

(L – Louis)

A J'ai passé pas mal de temps aux Archives Gaies du Québec, sur Amherst, et j'ai trouvé plusieurs choses sur La Veille électronique, mais j'ai rien vu...

L That's past '94, '95?

A Mhm...

L Because I re-did it, there was new editions in 2008 and 2009...

A Yeah, I saw that as well...

L And also I went around different regions in Québec, and also I go to a camp every year, it's called 'Camp Positive'?

A Yeah, you said in the e-mail that you've just been...

L So, I do interviews there as well for the Electronic Wake and at that place it's particularly working good because it's, erm, a close community and, you know, as soon as you arrive there it's different because everybody is HIV-positive so it's the inverse of the regular world that we live in, you know, where you always have the fear of being pointed at, you know, but there, everybody is just like you, so it's already different and there's something that adds some kind of intimacy to what's happening there.

A OK...

L It's very interesting.

A So, what do you do with that, do you record, genre, des témoignages?

L Yeah, basically, yeah. I don't do any editing actually...

- A Yeah, someone at the Archives had mentioned that, I can't remember his name...
- L John? Did you talk to John, right?
- A Maybe it was him... it was a friend of, erm, Ross Higgins, but I can't remember the name of the friend but he'd said, oh yeah, I think he'd said that he'd worked on the project with you...
- L Yeah it's with John, he worked on my project, he's been one of my best volunteers for the two summers we've been on the, have you seen the Parc de l'espoir there?
- A Ouais...
- L The ugly park... So we've made the installation there two summer alongs [sic], three days a week at evenings and we're there with these flowers, actually I can even show you these sculptures just by here, after the interview, and, erm, there was like twelve sculptures and in the sculptures you would have testimonies of people, HIV and non-HIV people, so the idea was to have a talk around HIV.
- A Is that with the shoes, shoes in a circle?
- L Yeah.
- A OK, Ah right...
- L And it was so bizarre, you know, people would come, because usually when there's an intervention on AIDS, you know, there's always the big sign, 'AIDS, come and inform yourself', and you know, people just fear and don't go, whereas with this exposition, people would be curious and they would come and start listening to some interviews and then they would realise, 'oh, they're talking about AIDS, they're talking about what?' you know, so that's my approach...
- A OK... so is that what you wanted to do with the project, did you want to make people feel more comfortable approaching AIDS, or did you have an idea in mind about what you wanted, what you wanted to bring about with

La Veille électronique? Or was it just to explore more generally, I don't know...

L If it was for what, sorry?

A If it was kind of to explore people's feelings more generally about AIDS or...

L The idea behind it was really to let AIDS have an existence, you know, in people's minds, in people's say, we could start a discussion, you know, so having a discussion with the people concerned, you know because here the village is quite concerned, so that was the idea behind it. Actually I didn't have any idea if it would work or not. First time I did it in '94, or '95, '94, and we had several teams in different organisations, making interviews and all that, and then at gay pride we had some kind of big sculptures with television sets that we got donated and all that, it was quite awkward because everything was done with VHS, and with all the cabling and all that it was awful, but it worked. But we did it for one day and we were exhausted for the rest of the year! And this time we did it with small DVDs in the sculpture, and it was much more versatile, easy to integrate new videos and all that, so at first, as I told you, I thought that maybe I would be there a few nights and people would just say 'get lost, we're not interested in all that', but I was amazed at the response, you know, all the people that wanted to be interviewed and have their say, you know, and all the different views that people had, because actually when you're talking about AIDS, you're talking about intimacy, because it's something that you can catch with intimacy, so if you want to talk about it, well, you have to be intimate. Like if I ask you 'how did you get AIDS?', you know, well... [laugh]

A [laugh]

L I need to, if I want to explain I need to be specific. So, and it's in the specifics that you can understand others, you know, like why did this person put herself or himself in that situation, you know, because I hear so much of people saying, well, how come... like me, I got it '94, and when I showed, I think it was getting out of the cinema when *Le Bain de Monsieur*

Soleil was shown, and I heard somebody say, 'how can you get AIDS from HIV?' in 1994, you know? For me it made no sense, you know, but if you listen to the stories, the different stories, and all that, then you get to know more about it, because people think they are preserved from it, because they are following some kind of rules, and for them it's not gonna happen, because, you know, they follow some rules, but, as soon as you touch someone, there's a risk. There's a different level of risk, but there's a risk.

A It's still there.

L But if you get it, it's like the lottery, you win, you know, so you have to endorse that risk, to accept that 'well, it may happen', so it's a choice that you make in your life, like you can decide to be working in an office all your life, or you can decide to be a car driver, you know, a racing car, so the risk is quite a little bit different from one to the other, but it's different choices in life, and there's different reasons why you would do so, you know... did I answer your question?

A Yeah! I can't even remember now, but...

L Yeah!

A I don't really mind because I just wanted to have a conversation, I didn't want it to be too formal...

L But if ever I don't answer exactly a question you have in mind just repeat or whatever...

A Oh sure. There were some things that I was just thinking of ideas of things that I wanted to ask about, erm, can I ask you some things about *Comment vs dirais-je* ?

L Yeah sure.

A Erm, what did I want to ask...

L Comment Vous Dirais-Je!

A Comment Vous-Dirais-Je! J'y arrive. Why did you choose to film such a big moment?

L OK! OK, that's...

A If there's anything you don't want to answer then don't worry.

L No that's fine, don't worry. It's just that I have to structure things so it's understandable. The thing with my work is that, there's one thing I have to explain to you, is that, my work for some is an art work, for some others it's prevention, for some other it's social interventions, and, so I kind of wear different hats. Actually when you ask for grants it's very complicated because then they would say 'that's not our domain'.

A 'What is it...'

A Apart from that it's really a mix of different things, which makes it work for my understanding. Everything was done through inspiration, it's really an inspiration work in the sense that nothing was planned in advance, like, even with my parents, I knew I was bringing a camera and I wanted to do interviews and all that, but the idea of making a movie and, you know, to present it to others, it really wasn't there. It may have been there in a way that, well, maybe there's gonna be something big, you know, or whatever, but it's not that which was important. What was important was to, actually with my parents, the thing was that, I told them in '92 that I was gay. I'm 49 now, so I was... whatever. You calculate after, ok? [laugh]

A [laugh]

L But, and I waited very long because I knew that my parents had strong prejudice against that, and, you know, I didn't want to deal with them, with that, and when I left my parents, when I was young, it really was a big fight with them, we didn't have a good agreement on anything, I felt very restrained in many ways because my parents were very strict in the education of the kids and they are very religious... anyway, they didn't really fit me. So I went away and I did my things and I went to school and all that, and then in '92 I decided I would tell them I was gay, so I was in Ottawa actually, over the phone, we didn't have much contact then. I would call them and I decided to tell them that I was gay, and that was after I got homophobia attack from someone on the street, you know, like I told

myself well OK that's enough, I was just gonna tell everyone and forget about it. And that actually was out of nowhere, the attack and all that, but that's a different story. And... I went there with the idea... actually what I wanted to say is, when I told them I was gay, I did it over the phone, and the rest of my family knew already, so it kind of spilled to my parents anyways, and what we all pretended that we didn't know, and so I told them it was kind of a flat when I told, OK, there's no big deal, you know, you're not making a fuss out of it, or, you know... I was expecting, you know, a big drama thing and all that but they didn't do anything! Actually if I told them I'd just bought a green shirt, you know it would be the same thing, exactly the same thing, but I was kind of, you know, deceived by that. Because I expected that, well for me it took me a lot of courage to say well, ok, 'I'm gay now, I want to say it'...

A You want a reaction.

L Yeah! But there was no reaction. They say, 'OK, so what else?' OK, what else... So when I got HIV, I am always mixing HIV and AIDS, for me it's the same. For some people there's a big difference, for me it's the same virus, however. So, the thing is, it was very intimate for me, very intimate, and I would say it was a spiritual experience to learn that you are HIV, because I got it at the age of 30, and it really didn't make sense because, as I said earlier, like many people I kind of followed the rules, even more than that, I was so scared by this, that actually I didn't really have any more sex life other than fellatio...

A Yeah I think I saw in the video, yeah, I remember that...

L So it was kind of worrying, but, you know, I felt that I was safe, you know, but as I told you, as soon as you touch someone, there's a risk that you have to accept it. So it didn't really make sense at all, what happened to me. Me, at age thirty, I thought I would live forever, you know, like every kids I guess, and, you know, the world was before me, and I would, you know, have years to live, and, you know, do big things and all that... and it really was a shock to realise that I was just a human being and I would die like everyone, and probably would die soon, like maybe in two years,

and two years is quite short when you're thirty. So, maybe you wouldn't even that, you would die with suffering, you would be rejected by everyone, you know, the big stuff like that, so it really was a shock, because at that time there was no medication, and all that, so it really was, what was the best perspective, when you have that. So, it brought me to the thinking of, 'well, what do I do? who do I say [sic]? who do I tell that I'm HIV, and why should I tell them, and what do I have to gain from that?' So I had to deal with this questioning, like for example, my closest sister, of course I would tell her right away, you know, as soon as it would be possible, but then, like my parents, I said, well, what do I do with them? Like, do I want to continue or start over, or, you know, fix the relation we have? Or do I to want to just let go and never have any more contact? So the choice was to cut completely with them, or to try to fix something...

A Start again...

L Well, kind of fix the relationship. Well, finally, actually the exercise was to try to find what was left out of our relation that was worth it, and to try to build on that, you know. So, but before that, I had to process many things that I left with them, and, erm, because for me to tell someone I was HIV was very confronting in the sense that, well, it would be so easy for someone to just reject me and, you know, spit on me, and say, well, you got it because you ran after it, you know? Which wasn't the case. But still, you know, you don't want that, you don't wanna hear that, so, with the experience I had with my parents with the judgements they had with gays and all that, you know, when I was young, I was very fearful of that kind of situation happening. So, in the meantime, I did tell a few friends, and I was working in an arts centre which is called PRIM, and during that time I got HIV, and a friend of mine there told me 'if you want my camera this weekend just grab it and do whatever you want', and I had never experimented with a camera and all that, I did sound for quite a long time but with camera I didn't know anything about it, so it was a Hi8, actually that's when the first time I took this camera, I did the shots from *Le Bain de Monsieur Soleil*...

- A The very first time was that?
- L Yeah. I said, well what do I do with this, so I brought this to a park where I used to go...
- A Yeah, where is the park?
- L Ah, that used to be a secret, but now it's not really a secret, it's by Champlain Bridge.
- A Ah ok, 'cos I say there was the cars going by and I thought it looked like somewhere on the side of a highway... It doesn't matter where it is I was just curious myself as to where that was!
- L Well I used to keep it secret because I wanted to preserve it, because there's less and less places where gays can have that kind of experience, and for me it was kind of precious, in a way, you know. So people would ask and I would not really answer. So...
- A You wanted to keep it a secret...
- L Yeah... but before that?
- A Erm, merde on était où là? Ah, it was the first time you had used the camera...
- L Yeah, so I brought it there and I did that, ah yeah OK, that was just a parenthesis on *Le Bain de Monsieur Soleil*, but the thing I was saying is, I started to, I had that first experiment, and then I told myself, why don't you experiment with, erm, because from my youth I have always been experimental with a lot of different things, electricity, whatever, and for me it was just another object of experimentation, so I told myself, well ok, you're living a situation where you are kind of 'fragilised', and you have to confront people that you love, with the news that, well, as I say often, there's no good way to say a bad news, you know, but you don't know how these people are gonna react, so in a sense it was for me a way to protect myself, but it was also a way for me to analyse what was happening at that special point where there's a disclose, and it was for the other people to look at themselves, and I started experimenting with that, and I did maybe

like fifteen interviews, like my parents? I did that with different people, and everybody was kind of different, there was actually the centre, there really was a range of different reactions, and one special reaction was one from the centre where I was working, there was a director there, and she was kind of, erm, control freak, she kind of... she was actually doing, how do you say that, when someone replaces someone... internship?

A Temporary?

L Yeah. So she was kind of replacing, but everybody was kind of, you know, doing politics for gaining power and all that, and me I was in charge of the audio studio in that place, I was on the program and on the welfare at that point, and I remember an interview I did with her, and she was quite shocked actually. So much that after that, she called an inspector at the police, who called me and said 'well, you have to give her back the cassette' and all that, and I said 'what's that?' I mean it's my cassette, she agreed to do that, and I told her 'if you don't want to show it I won't show it', there's nothing... you know.

A Yeah, once you agree to it, you shouldn't change your mind... well, she did!

L Well, I really put her in front of her contradiction, you know, because she was the kind of people, very, 'I'm so great with the HIV people, and I do volunteering and all that...'

A And then she met someone for real...

L And then I put her in front of the situation where I was being pushed out of my situation at that job, and with her workings, you know, and that was taking advantage of the situation where I was 'fragilised' by the situation. So she was kind of trapped in what was being said there, so... and she knew she was not right, you know, to me in the weeks before, so, anyways it's not the kind of work I'm wanting to do, I can do that quite well, but it's not the thing, it was one of the limits that I went into. Actually when the police called me, and I said 'well, I have to think about it, I don't owe her anything'...

- A You haven't broken any rules or anything...
- L But then, I had to mingle with the idea, well what do I do really, because in a sense I didn't want to be harmful to people, I just want people to be conscious of their actions, so actually I remember one day I was carrying the tape with me, it was a Hi8 tape, and I found myself over a drain in the street, you know with the big cracks, and I said 'OK what do I do', so I said 'I'm gonna flip the cassette, if it drops in then it's done, if it doesn't then I give it to her', and I gave it back to her.
- A OK...
- L But I wish I could see it again, you know, today, anyways, so that's the story!
- A That's really funny [laughs]
- L Yeah, I do a lot of... coin flipping in the things I do, I am very confident that things turn good easily. So what I want to say is that I did a lot of experimentation like that, and everybody that I interviewed was reacting differently, you know, and also what I realise after time and time, is also that my implication in the interviews and all that was not neutral, because, especially with people I already knew and I had a story with them, there was kind of a confrontation on, 'OK, we have to', erm... I was not conscious of it at that time, but I realised maybe, years after, for me it was a way to level out any discrepancies between my view of our relationship and yours, you know. If there's anything wrong, from you, from your feelings of our relationship or mine, you know, I don't know if I explain that right...
- A Yeah, yeah...
- L Then we have to work it out, we have to speak it, you know, out loud and see what's wrong, and, you know, make peace of it, you know, make peace or just decide that we're over, you know, and that was very important for me, that I would be in peace with people I would say them, I would tell them, so that was the same thing with my parents. So when I went to my parents I decided that after my experience with some other people, I decided to go to my parent's chalet, summer house, and I did an

interview with my mother for two hours first, and I was there for a week, and then my mother kind of forced my father into an interview, which I made with him for an hour, which was quite good actually. And after that, I made another interview with my father, and then I made an interview, a few days later, I made an interview with my both parents together, because they find themselves as being a couple, you know, pretty much, like they won't say 'I', they would say 'we', so it's kind of monolithic, but for me it was very important to deal with one person, and then the couple, so at that point I didn't say anything about the situation to neither of them, and when I had them both in interview, I still didn't know if I would tell them yet...

A Ahh...

L So for me it was really to work on the relation and see is there love behind, you know, all the troubles we had, is there something between us, you know, so I really had to go through all... and actually I remember that my angriness at first, I lived a lot of different states when I got the news, and at some point my angriness towards my parents came up, and I sent them something very ugly, you know, well considering how they are, you know, their lifestyle and all that, I sent them a picture of a guy masturbating, you know, on the internet, in black and white, and I said in the bottom, it said 'don't send me condolence, send me money'.

A [Laughs]

L And it was anonymous, it was horrible! But everything had a meaning, you know, and, like the condolence and the money, I said money because my parents, they always, they are unable to, well at that time, actually, they were unable to express their feelings other than 'well, I'll give you some money for this' which I always refused because I didn't want to be in a relation with that. So what I wanted was really feelings, you know, real interaction and all that which they were incapable of, so...

A Did they ever think that it was you who sent the picture?

L Yeah actually during the interview, that was one of the last things that I asked them, and they said 'we really didn't know', you know, they said 'we

went to see the priest and ask them', because they always go to the priest anyways, and then they said 'well, we asked their close friends' and they couldn't really know who it was and they had no clue, you know. And I think that for them it was a relief to know that it was from me, and actually I was quite surprised that they didn't overreact or anything, because with all the work we did doing the interviews, we were to a point where I was able to tell them that, and telling them that and seeing them react so softly...

A Is a big achievement.

L It was a big achievement, yeah, and it was kind of telling me, 'well, OK, now that's said, everything is said, there's nothing worse you can tell them but say that you have HIV', you know, and I felt that at that point I could tell them. And that's where the movie starts, actually. So before that, there's an hour of shooting, you know, before that, which is another movie I may release at some time which I called *La Lancée de la Bombe*...

A OK [laughs]

L But it would take me a lot of humility to release that. Because actually, when *Comment vs dirais-je ?* went on screen, it went in different festivals and it went in, actually to my big surprise, you know because I was not a director or anything like that, I was just trying things, putting things together and not expecting very much of it...

A It got nominated for an award...

L Yeah, exactly, so it kind of got big, actually. I was not used of having so much sunlight on me, so it was kind of scary for me. And we even got to national TV, you know, CBC?

A Ah right!

L CBC French, with my parents. They got invited by Christiane Charette, and it was a very good interview actually, with them and with me, and I don't know, did you get a copy of that? Was it on your copy of *Comment vs dirais-je ?*

A No.

L OK, I can get that to you if you want.

A OK, yeah!

L That's very interesting. And... I wanted to say something but I don't remember.

A That's alright. I just find it so fascinating, it's just... I loved it! The way that it was so... real. That none of it was, that none of it felt staged, that it was a real person telling their real parents...

L Yeah, yeah...

A Something big and seeing how they really reacted...

L Yeah, actually if you plan something like that...

A It's not the same.

L Exactly, but the thing I wanted to say was that, to my surprise, I didn't have any expectation, but I realised that when the film went out, you know, on screen and in the festivals and all that, that the reception was very different from one person to another. And the same with *Le Bain de Monsieur Soleil*, you know, when it showed at the gay festival, there was two projections planned, and actually they added two more, to my surprise. And during two of these projections, maybe half of the...

A Left?

L Yeah, during the... because it was too much intimacy I think, but like the film with my parents, the twist with the journalists was that it was a film 'coup-de-poing', like, erm... how do you say that. A movie... a knocking movie? They labelled it as 'un essai', but for me it's more of an experimental work, you know... but it was ok, they can think whatever they want.

A How did things go with your parents after you'd made the film? Did you manage to find that you could salvage the relationship with them? I was so interested in what happens next, how did it continue?

L Well for once, you know, like we could have everything said, which was a great advance for me. Because everything was under... nothing was said in our family. So for me it was a great advance, and on that basis we started to have a much better relationship...

A Good!

L Yeah, it really turned into something beautiful. Of course my parents and I have very different backgrounds, and their way of seeing life, you know, they are still very religious, even more and more as they get older, and me it's totally different, you know, so... of course, we don't agree... it's not that we don't agree, we don't share a lot of experiences or, you know, things like that but we can communicate and be together and be happy to be there, so that's fine with me, so...

A Oh good, well I'm glad it had a happy ending!

L Because if it really was 'un film coup-de-poing' as they said, I would have knocked them out, you know? But that was not my intention.

A Could I talk about *Le Bain de Monsieur Soleil* as well?

L Mhm.

A To start off with, what does the title... why call it '*Le Bain de Monsieur Soleil*'? 'The Bath of Mister Sun'? Je trouvais ça drôle, je voulais savoir pourquoi, qui prenait le bain, et c'était qui Monsieur Soleil?

L Really, I couldn't answer that, because it was pure inspiration? I said 'OK, that's *Le Bain de Monsieur Soleil*', and actually the place where I used to work, you know, the arts centre, my friends working there started to call me Mister Soleil, you know, it was kind of funny. And actually I made an affiche... how do you say that?

A A poster?

L Posters, for my movie, and there was four posters with four different images, and one of them was, you know, the park, from the back, naked, with the nature in the back, and that was really too much for the director there. She censored it and she didn't want it on the walls and I say 'well, I

am one of the artists here, what's that?', you know? How can you censor that? It's crazy. No, the title... I don't know.

A OK, there doesn't have to be an answer to all these questions, it's just me wanting to... I don't know.

L Do you see something in it?

A No, erm... I saw that there were sunflowers a few times that came back and I thought that 'Monsieur Soleil', un tournesol, I don't know, I just thought maybe there was something there... But in the colours as well, in the woods it's so... c'était pas aveuglant, mais c'était ensoleillé, and I thought oh, well, all these bright, cheery colours, it was something exciting and something happy, and it kind of, for me anyway, it gave a tone to the cruising, and the meeting the guys in the woods, it kind of gave it a happy side that I didn't think I would associate with something that was more kind of sexual and raw, it was kind of, it was almost sweet... c'était un peu cute, là!

L That's kind of it, actually. For me...

A It was more intimate than I thought it would be with all the colours and the conversation with the third guy who you speak with for a lot longer... It was that, it was more intimate than I thought it would be, and that was a surprise, and I'm glad it surprised me.

L And how did you feel watching it? Did you feel comfortable, or... there were kinds of tensions there?

A At first...

L Be honest!

A Well at first it's two guys jerking each other off and more stuff, and that's not something that shocks me in the first place, that's fine. But, erm, it lasted longer than I thought it would, the scenes of, you know, the camera fixe, là, and just everything going on in front of it, and it did get to a certain point where I thought, is this gonna end, is it gonna keep on going, and to

what point is it going to stop, and maybe there is a bit of prude, I don't know how to say that in French...

L But you know someone told me that the hot thing about it was that it's not that you saw cocks, and you know, because sexually there's not much there, compared to the porn you can get on the market, but the hot part was to conciliate the intimacy of the conversation, and that part, the sex, you know, so it was kind of 'OK, we're seeing quite large in the range of the intimacy', you know. And also for the people like in the cinemas, for some people it was too much intimacy because for them just to be there and watch it was kind of a statement. Well, OK, I kind of agree, some people really had to stand out and go, because they wanted to detach themselves from that. It was kind of... I enjoyed it a lot!

A Oh! Good, well it's your film, I hope so!

L One thing I wanted to say which is also about the title, and all the arrangements of the colours... for me it's a celebration of nature, because when I was living that period, I really started to make every moment a fulfilment of joy, how do you say that... un émerveillement. So for me it was that, you know, and doing that through the screen was kind of an event for me too, because I was living things with that filming and looking at it after that, and everything was kind of being put in perspective, you know it was kind of a mise-en-abime, you know? So, and also if you see even nature got into it, kind of, it's very strange, things happen. Like, if you look at the first sex part, it's your film, at the end of it there's a little papillon? That right after the scene just flies around like that, and I found it so sweet, I mean, if I wanted to arrange that, I could never have had it. And there it was there, you know, that papillon, so...

A The other thing, when, if it was just you on the screen, in the woods, in the grass, when it was just you there, but then when someone else came on, one of the three, there was a clock that came on, that counted up time, that kind of appeared, and I wondered why that appeared when someone else moved into the shot...

- L Every time there was a sex action, there would be the time code coming in, and the same thing, like people would ask me, well why don't you show the guy that interviewed me at the end, you know, I don't know if he asked me in the interview, but I know he asked me a lot of times well why don't you show your face, you know... but for me it's not relevant, like... I felt that putting the time code there was making something else than just sex, and also having the time code is also well, I don't know if it's, well, I guess you did, but sometimes you have sex with some person and you really feel the time present, and that's probably had something to do...
- A Right, OK...
- L Like, every sensation, every moment, every, you know, sensation, smell, everything, you know, because when you know that you're going to die, every second, every nano-second, is important, and you really value it and you really taste it as much as you can, so that was part of it.
- A That's amazing... I don't know what to say, that's just... I just find that so amazing. Because part of what I'm trying to write was how does, you know, because there's other films that I'm looking at, films that have been, you know, more, how do you say it, mainstream. I wanted to look at *Le Déclin de l'empire américain*, and *Zero Patience* de John Greyson... y avait un film récemment, *Funkytown*? Qui s'agissait du disco à Montréal dans les années soixante, il y avait quelqu'un là-dedans qui attrapait le SIDA, but I wanted to compare kind of, how, well look at how mainstream representations of it differ to, you know, 'non-mainstream', and like how someone who doesn't have AIDS or who someone who isn't HIV-positive chooses to represent it against someone who is or who does... What were the other films... by Esther Valiquette?
- L *Le Singe bleu*?
- A Yeah, exactly, so I wanted to kind of look at...
- L Hers are on the same compilation tape as mine at Vidéographe.
- A Yeah, I managed to find *Le Singe Bleu* and *Le Récit d'A*?

- L That's *Le Récit d'A* who is with my movie...
- A And so, I'm just interested in that really, and it's, for me anyway, it's amazing to speak to someone who has actually made these films, so thank you very much for this, it's like meeting a star or something!
- L Nah, not true...
- A Well a little bit.
- L I am really out of the circuit at the moment.
- A Well sure but you made these films that are there forever, like a land mark that's not gonna move, that's there, that's always there for people to look back at...
- L It's really, like, something so different, it marks a point in my life, in the époque, you know, as well, and it was not made to make money, it was not made to get glamorous, nothing like that, so it just was made out of inspiration. So there's a lot of things I did, most of the things I did with these movies, I really had no idea why I was doing it. I just follow my inner sense of, well 'OK you have to do that, just do it like that', or whatever.
- A Yeah. OK. And if you were to compare the two, *Comment vs dirais-je ?* And *Le Bain de Monsieur Soleil*, is there any, well, not conflict... I was just wondering how in your mind the two films sit, was one more useful for... I don't know, if you were to compare the two, films, is there any feelings that come out of that?
- L Well actually, since there were no intentions in making the movie, like, *Le Bain de Monsieur Soleil*, I really didn't plan to do anything of this, I just, like I told you it was the first time I tried a camera, but then someone at the festival, the gay festival, said 'well, you did that, you really have to show it' and all that, and, you know, so he pushed me into it and I said 'OK well, let's do it'. But, you know, looking afterwards at, at how, you know, the place of these two movies, there's really one thing which is basic in both, well, one of the things is that it was made out of inspiration, as I told you, one of the main things I would say was, the intimacy that it provoked, the

intimacy within the movie and also the intimacy that it was kind of grabbing out of the viewers. So I remember there was a friend of mine, who was doing a doctorate at the Université de Montréal, I think, and his girlfriend, and it was a good friend, and I happened to tell them about that movie and then they started to insist to see it, because for me it was not really a public movie, neither of them actually, well, *Comment vs dirais-je ?* is more public because it is distributed by Vidéographe, but other than that, you know, for me it was not public, and it was not intended...

A For other people to see...

L By that kind of people, you know. It was really made in the context of being shown at the festival. The gay festival, and that audience, so... they really insisted so I showed them, and it was really hard. Actually, I never really heard about them after that. There's things that, you know, you can share with people who are ready to see, and some which aren't, you know, even if they say they are...

A You don't know until it happens...

L It doesn't compute, you know, it's too much confrontation going on in that movie. Which is kind of strange, because for me it's such a simple movie, you know, it's so immature in a way, you know, and it's so... there's no intention. So how you see is kind of a reality, and you have to digest it in a way that you can integrate, you know, especially if you know the person who's done that movie. Which it was kind of too hard for them I guess. At that time, or maybe it was too hard for the relation between them, because I was closest to the guy, than to his girlfriend, because we made a lot of different projects together and all that, it was sad. But anyways, that was it.

A Would you regret putting them out there into the public, or...

L Putting what?

A Would you regret putting the films, well at least one of them, into the public, into society, you know, people can see it on Vidéographe, Vithèque, and people saw it at the film festivals, do you regret allowing it, the two films,

to move out of your personal life, your personal space, into somewhere else where they could be judged by people who you don't know...

L It's a good question, I think it's not really that I wanna keep the control of how it's seen, but it's rather than... I think it's too much for some people. And I don't want to be confronted?

A Confrontational?

L Yeah, to other people. Because for me, I think change arises when people agree, not when they disagree, like I know there's a lot of actions, political actions, and things like that that was gained through political actions and confrontations and all that, if you look at the black movement, you know, a lot of things like that, but really if you want to have something that's going to be gained and, you know, that you can rely on, like the gay rights here in Canada, it's great, you know, we have laws and all that, you can marry and all that, but really how is it perceived by the population in general, you know? Even if you go in the Plateau there's not so much guys who hold hands or, if you wanna kiss a guy you can in the Village, but out of that it's kind of gross, you know? So, still it's not accepted that much, it's not like, you're my friend just like anybody else, so for me, you know, of course there's that part where you have to confront institutions and things like that, but it's as much even more important to make friends with your enemies and see what you agree upon and what you can build upon this to go further in the relationship, you know, that's openness. If you want to share with someone, you have to be open as much me, as a gay man, as other people which are, hetero, you know. So there's an exchange where 'OK, you have a view of things, I have a view of things, how can we manage?', you know. There's some people which you can never... my brother, he is a reformist... reformed Baptist? So, you know, for them, all truth is in the bible, and the interpretation that they do of the bible is right, so starting from there, there's not much room for...

A Anything that isn't...

L Yeah... so I tried, and even, like his wife, we tried it and she didn't, at some point I said, you know, well I cannot go to your place anymore because I

feel like I'm constrained to some kind of cultural personality, because you fear for your children or whatever, you know. So I don't want to live that, you know, I just want to be myself. So I won't go to your place anymore. So that discussion never happened, you know, I remember once we were back from Québec with my brother, and we kind of tried a discussion on this, but he was basically returning my arguments, you know, folded over to his, whatever. So it was useless. But you know, you have to accept that some people are just locked into some kind of thinking, and what I perceive is that, for some people, you know, their view on life, is a construction, you know. Like some people, you know, it's based on the bible or whatever, or religion, and everything is structured in a way, and that if you take a brick out, you know, the whole construction may go down, you know. So if you try to say, 'well, homosexuality is OK', it doesn't compute... it's too dangerous because all the building's gonna go down, and for them it's very scary because it takes, all their life is done according to these principles.

A I know it's hypothetical, and it doesn't really matter, but if you found out that you got HIV now, as opposed to when you were thirty, do you think you still would have made the films? Or, do you think anything would have been different?

L Well of course it's very hypothetical, but first, I am not the same age, and my life experience would be very different because I would not have had that at the thirties, so how would I be, I would probably be a monster by then! The thing is that if you get HIV today, it's quite different from then, because my feeling, and also from what I hear through my interviews, it's not that you fear for your life, so much, than for how you're perceived...

A How other people see you...

L Because today it's more a question of stigmatisation, than really the dying, or the, because that's no more the question. You have AIDS today and you're gonna live as long as everyone. So would I go into so much questioning about myself? I don't think so. So for me, you know, as I say sometimes, getting HIV was a real saviour. You know, like of course it's kind of a disaster, but past that it's a life experience, you know, from that

life experience, for me it was just great because it really made me somebody totally different. So it's reoriented my life in many different ways.

A OK...

L I don't say that you have to get HIV...

A Oh no, sure! I just wanted to see... I don't know. I just wanted to see, I don't know how to describe that, like, the life behind the film...

L Sorry?

A Like the life of the person, you, behind the short film that you see, I wanted to see... I'm explaining myself badly. There's no right or wrong answers, I just wanted to see how you felt about it all. Does that make sense? Maybe not...

L No, not really...

A I don't think I am either.

L That's alright, try again.

A Let me just see what else I had thought of. Would you do another Veille électronique? Are there any planned? Would you do it again?

L That's very, very... I'm actually...

A Or would it be a case of if you felt like you wanted, you just had to wait and see if you really felt you wanted to do it, you know, if everything, if it's kind of in the inspiration of the moment, I suppose you have to wait and see if you would feel like you would want to do it again...

L No it's really not that...

A Or is it just a pain in the ass to coordinate...

L It's, erm, actually, I can't get rid of the Wake, The Electronic Wake, that's the thing. Because the last time I did it in 2008 and 2009, I really went on burn out in the fall because it was really way too much. When you are organising something like that, and there's a lot of people involved, like there was 50 volunteers, there were, like I did almost 300 interviews so

far, so all these people, you are in touch with them, and there's emotional things, there's also logistics and all that, there's the aspect, there's the grant and the proposal, the finance you have to get, the administration, the lighters, the political side, there's so much things going on...

A To do...

L To do, and I even realised now, that to go further, well, just to continue, it has to go much further. Like, it's got to a point where there's so many things involved, there's so different possibilities as well, and there's so much lack of... I don't have the energy to render the project to where it's up to right now. OK? So for me, basically, like I told you, I cannot get rid of it, out of my life, because it's there every day, like... I don't know why it sticks on me, I feel I have to keep on going for that project? I don't know actually what the form it's gonna take next time. One thing I would say for sure, well quite sure, it won't be in that fucking park there...

A Do you not like that?

L Eh?

A Do you not like the Parc?

L No, the park is fine, well I don't like the morbid aspect of it, that's one thing, but it's all the politics of it, and really, it was so much a pain.

A Parce que ça appartient à la ville?

L It belongs to the city, and it's kind of hijacked by political, you know, political...how do you say that. Pressure groups?

A Yeah, yeah.

L But is it really them, it's kind of, it was kind of captured and it's our park. And so that park has been there like that so much because they don't want to do anything, change anything and all that, and there's been a lot of political things between them and the city, and the commercial association, and there's different powers going with and against, and different strategies from, you know, or hidden agendas from, you know, and that got so complicated, you know. The first year I made it, well in '94 it was no

problem, it was only one day. So we didn't even ask for any authorisation, and there was zero budget, so basically it was out of nowhere, and it just happened and that was it. But then when it got back in 2008, then I got funding and I went around to get money and to do it and all that, and we were there for the whole summer! But at the beginning, you know, everybody was looking at it, you know, 'oh, OK, you're doing some kind of little event there, OK, you want my approval?', you know? But nobody suspected that, even me, I didn't expect that it would make anything really, out of some kind of art thing, you know? But it really was big, you know? And so when you do something that... displaces a lot of air, it's kind of get feared by other organisation or, you know, some people would be scared that I would get on grants they would have normally, and things like that, some other organisations felt that it was not right to talk about AIDS and HIV on the Saint Catherine's...

A Dans le Parc de l'espoir, mon dieu, 'non non non...'

L Exactly! And some people would say, 'well we, it's important that we talk about HIV, and all that, but we can't actually give you our support because nah nah nah...' You know, all this bullshit, I don't buy, and I'm really fed up, and I don't want to deal with that, that's so much negative energy, even the festival here, you know, he asked me in the second year in 2009, he asked me 'well we're doing the programming in print, and we wonder if you would like to be in it', you know, I said 'well OK, you can put me in, but you have to say that it's organised by Kulturbine, my organisation, and presented as such.' And he said 'OK that's fine', but when it got printed out, it was their own event, and, you know, so I gave shit to the guy, and then everything started to crumble, because they were arranged with the city, so I got my grants cut, and... big shit, you know. So, I like to be independent from these people. You know. But it's like that in every organisation, even in arts organisations. I had a grant, for doing an activity descending from the Veille électronique, it was about going into AIDS organisations, and doing kind of Veille électronique around them, you know. So I got a grant of \$15,000. The thing is that, since my organisation was not two years old, I couldn't apply for it by myself, so I teamed up with

an arts organisation, which I have known for years and I worked there and all that, but you know these organisation people change, and, you know the cultures change, and the structure may be good, but depending on who's got the control, it may go very wrong, you know. And, at that time, that organisation was having a lot of problems, and so we got a grant, but when I said 'OK I am gonna start this fall', the director told me 'well I'm sorry but we don't have any more money, we all spend it'...'WHAT? What, you spent it?' He said, 'well, just don't make a big deal about it, we're gonna...'

A Don't make a big deal about spending \$15,000...

L Yeah, and he said 'we're gonna arrange it, we're gonna, we're about to do things with the bank, and we're gonna have special grants and all that to relieve the organisation' and all that, and it was a big, big mess, too, and it appeared that they did a lot of very bad things, actually the organisation, after they finally left two years after, once the members would, you know, realise that everything was not going so well, you know, because these kind of people hide their doings, and all that. So it appeared that the organisation was like 700,000 in the red, and they had to re-do the hypothèque on the building, so it was big, big, big shit and actually I just let go for the grant, you know. So after all these experiences I said 'well, OK, this is not working.' I really want to do it, but I have to find a way where it's possible...

A Where it's gonna work, and there's not gonna be people who are gonna fuck it up...

L Yeah... and also, like the dynamics in the organisation, the AIDS organisations, is there's a lot of... how do you say that...

A Genre, rivalité?

L Yeah. So if someone has an idea they're gonna try to copy it, so it's really hard to make something that is gonna apply to everyone, where everyone agrees, and to go through a channel where you can have a grant and do

it for the benefit of everyone, you know? There's always things where it seems 'if you do that, it's gonna cut on us...' So it's very very difficult...

A I don't understand why it's like that. Well, surely everybody would want to help each other, but no.

L That's not how humans work.

A Yeah, I shouldn't be so naïve as to expect people to get along in this kind of... it's a shame.

L Don't worry, I was very, very naïve to believe like that. You know, like in the AIDS organisations, there are the GPA principles, and it's adapted worldwide, it's a 'Greater Involvement of People with AIDS'. So basically it says that you have to facilitate anything where people with AIDS would like to get involved, to have their problems solved, but that's not the thing that I experienced, you know. So...

A There's the principle, and then there's the reality which is never the same...

L Yeah exactly. Even there's kind of organisations where, I am really talking about politics here but really don't put the focus on this...

A Sure.

L I just want to explain to you the details of it. Like, the federation of AIDS organisations in Québec, they have principles for organisations to apply and be a member of, details that the organisations must agree with the GPA principles, and different things like that. But, some organisations, you know, they have in their workings, statutes where, if you want to be part of the AGM, you have to be invited by the board, you know. Usually, you know, in organisations, you become a member, and then you go to the AGM and you make vote and you vote for whoever you want to be represented by. But some of these organisations, well, it's restricted to a select club.

A Enfin, ce n'est qu'un club d'élites...

- L Exactly! Because they want to keep control, and it doesn't make sense, it's not compatible with what the federation says, but you know, they are kind of locked in, because they were there at the beginning of the federation, and the federation cannot really go against its members, so...
- A OK.
- L It's really sad. If you know a rich man that wants to be listen, I can volunteer [laughs]
- A [laughs] OK. That's just really interesting to see all of the politics, it's like people gossiping, it's like in high school, 'he said this and she said that' and you would think, well, at least I would kind of hope that at some point that would stop, that people would grow up and just see what is the best thing to do for everyone, but no! Mais non! Ça continue.
- L But people are protecting their interests, you know. They want to keep their job, they want to... climb the echelle. They want to be big boss of this and that, you know, so there's always like back door things going on. Once, I had someone working very close to the organisation, my organisation, very, very close to the organisation, and someone came to me and said, he was working at the government agencies, and says, 'well, are you sure you want to work with this guy? Because he is supposed to represent you, but when he is in the meetings, he is actually talking against the organisation.' 'WHAT?' I was totally...
- A News to you...
- L I couldn't believe it. That guy just expected to climb, you know, so... It's sad. There's also these people who are just there because it's good to be there, they have benefits, they travel around the world, and, you know, great food and hotels and bars in London and wherever, you know. If you're doing that just for that, then please leave your place for someone who is interested...
- A In helping people, not just looking out for themselves.
- L Yeah exactly.

A OK.

L But that's just part of the human being.

A Yeah, everyone's like that. Well, a lot of people are like that. That's so disappointing! You hold out some hope that not everyone is gonna be like that, but non, enfin on est tous pareil.

L Pas tous mais...

A De plus ou moins...

L We all have our quirks, you know. I'm not saying that I am over the bunch, there are some things I know, but me I am trying to work on myself. But of course I have my quirks, and I'm a pain in the ass for some people. But please just let me know and we can try to deal or something. I don't need to be the big boss of anything. All I want to do is my projects, and you know that the projects is great, you probably want to have it, but you don't need to have it yourself, you can have it with everybody, you know? Because for me you know the response for HIV is talking, and also what I want to state is that, doing that, the Veille électronique, had a lot of other things coming up in the interviews, many subjects like suicide for example, was a big subject, drugs... what I realised with the Veille électronique is, for example, I was once in, that actually happened twice, once in Rimouski, when I was in Rimouski, and once when I was in Gatineau, OK, we were going with the organisation to universities and, you know, having different things, and one of the volunteers at Gatineau, she was with us, talking to people and showing the sculptures, giving information and whatever, and actually a place they had at the university was very, very quiet, so I told her, 'well, do you want to try it? Do you want to make an interview?' And she says 'I don't have AIDS', and I said 'well it doesn't matter', the starting point is HIV but it can go anywhere, and, you know, even though you just talk about HIV, your point of view is as much important as someone who is HIV, because what I want to state which is very important, is that, the problem with HIV is more too often, and still it's happening all the time, as much from the HIV people and from other people, is that HIV is a matter of HIV people. Which is not, because HIV affects everyone, you know. So,

as soon as you are human, or monkey, you know, you kind of have to deal with this. But some people, like HIV people, feel HIV is their thing, they have to manage it and all that, no, it's for everyone. Like, the charter at the Fondation Québécoise du SIDA, I voted against it, I told them, well that's wrong, you know, how can you say it's the charter for the HIV people? The charter should be signed by everyone, you know, stating that well, if we are having sex, it's one thing to make sure that we are aware of what we're doing, and we are responsible for what we do, you know!

A That doesn't just fall on you though, that's up to the other person, well for anyone to think about...

L Exactly!

A It's not just your thing to say, it's for...

L But doing a charter that applies only to HIV people, makes sounds like, well, it's our responsibility to take care of it, so it's us to deal with it, it's us to disclose, it's us... so I totally disagree! Anyways...

A Did it get voted? Did it pass?

L Yeah, they were really pushing on it because it was going on for years, and actually I, when I got aware of it, it was being adopted by the organisation where I was at the AGM, and I stood up and said 'well I don't agree' and so it was not accepted that year, but the year after it was adopted...

A It was, OK.

L Yeah. I don't wanna be a pain in the ass if everyone is going in one direction, I am gonna say what I have to say and if people don't agree then fine, it's fine, see where it goes. But I really feel that it is the sentiment of people which are HIV-negative, that it's not their problem, even the law tells them it's not their problem. But when you get it, well it's gonna be really your problem. So... But what I wanted to say was, about The Electronic Wake, was the interview with the woman...

A In Gatineau?

- L In Gatineau, yeah, I started talking about, whatever, and all that, and then the thing that came up, you know, that she was being abused by her boyfriend, so all of this came out, out of nowhere, and that was so strange. And that's where I start to think, well, maybe you could use that form of project, to manage a lot of different things...
- A Other things, yeah.
- L It's not only HIV, it could be for suicide, it could be for a lot of things. And that would be very interesting, that I can build a kind of, kit or whatever, that an organisation can then take...
- A To other groups...
- L Yeah, to all the groups who ever want it, you know, like doing something open source or whatever, but for this I need to develop like a, erm, an internet driver or motor? Where, you know, all the exchange and control and all this is taken care of, you know, like... but anyway, that's where I am, that's why I'm doing computers at school.
- A OK, right...
- L Because I have no money, and I have nothing before me, so what do I have to do? Well, I'm gonna go to school, and try to understand how it works. But you see, if everybody was working along on that project, it would go so fast...
- A And so much easier...
- L And so further and all that, my only wish is that I can get through it before I die, you know, because if I die, well, OK, that's it. Because the problem is, sometimes, people see a good project and they say 'well, we're gonna do something kind of similar and apply, we're a big organisation, we are known by the subsidors [sic], so it's gonna be easy for us to get the grant.' And by then, even the guy who wrote the proposal is not there anymore, when the project comes in...
- A And then we have to do it again...

- L But you know, you don't have someone behind the project who is supporting all the ideas and inspiration and all that...
- A Who keeps pushing and pushing...
- L Yeah, exactly, that's what I do. I don't get money for doing that, you know? I'd just like to have a living, doing what I do. But it's not happening, so I go to school.
- A Which school, is that a CEGEP?
- L Yeah, CEGEP du Vieux-Montréal. The communist...
- A [laughs] You said that when you first realised you had HIV, that it was a spiritual, that it was something spiritual, that it was something that allowed you to explore more?
- L To what?
- A It was something that allowed you to kind of get to know yourself more, you said that at the start...
- L Yeah, OK...
- A How do you feel, has that changed, is it still the same now? 15 or so years later, do you still feel, is it still something that is... is it still as present in your life as it was when you first...
- L It's strange because, emotional shock, you know, it has a kind of a curve, where there's a big peak at the beginning, and, you know, where you're kind of diffusing, dismantled in some way, and all that... and then you're kind of looking at you're gonna have to land somewhere at some point, but then you have to reformat your reference points. So in that moment, that period of time, for me, it's a grace, because everything can change so easily. Because nothing really has any more, tangible, you know, unmoveable, nothing is unmoveable, you know? I could have switched to being hetero, you know... it's not happened [laugh] As much as that I would say maybe not, but you know, just to say that everything can change in the way you see things, because, and it's an opportunity to really learn about life, about yourself and all that, and then at some point, strangely,

that window closes. And then you find yourself kind of in, stuck with, maybe not the same exactly, patterns or restrictions that you put yourself, because the restriction you have in your life, it has nothing to do with the exterior. Rather than what I was saying, all the problems with all the politics and all that, but the real thing that prevents you from going, you know, from doing your things, is from within yourself. The biggest barriers are from within yourself. And this is put upon yourself by yourself. And so, when you get your emotional shock, like that, that is a relief, it's totally, it's not present, at some point it comes back, in a different way, maybe, but... yeah, the opportunity to change a bit, that kind of structure, that restrains you. But also you understand that life can be different, and it can actually be anything. So once you touch that, and you know that it exists, then you can start looking for it. So basically that's what I have been doing since then, you know, with more or less success, like I have been smoking pot for ten years looking at my ceiling you know, in that, but still, that was kind of necessary I guess, in my pursuit. And, erm, yeah, I think that it's really important that what you do is related to that search. Like, the realisation of yourself is connected to your realisations... so that's why I can't get rid of *The Electronic Wake*. Because it's there, it needs to live, and I'm the one having the inspiration for it. So if I let go, you know, it just won't exist. So I have to do it. I don't have any means to do it, really, but you know, if I kick myself, I can find ways around all the politics. There's all these obstacles, but that's nothing, I can go around everything. But the only thing I have to do is to work on myself to be strong enough to do that...

A Yeah, OK.

L Does that answer your question?

A Yeah, yeah! It does.

L Also, one thing I want to add, is...

A I don't want to look at my questions too much because I'm enjoying just doing this more than being just...

- L No, it's alright to have some questions to talk about it, I just want to add, that *The Electronic Wake* for me is related to what I have done before. Like, when I did the *Comment vs dirais-je ?*, you know, it was a big success in a way, so... and then after that, people from the art community was coming to me and said 'well, OK, why don't you do another one?' And I felt like 'oh, so they are expecting me to do another *Coment Vous Dirais-Je?*' you know, out of nothing? So it's really kind of put a pressure on me...
- A Yeah exactly, the pressure will stop anything being made...
- L And since I didn't plan anything and it just happened, you know, well I did furnish the thing, but I didn't, it's not like making a movie from the start, and, you know, constructing a story, I can probably do that, but I don't believe that doing stories is as affective, because my thing in doing all that, is not to do an art, well it's part of it, but it's not the art piece which is important, it's not my name, you know, which is important, it's important to have a name, you know, in the art community in order to get grants and all that, but it's not, all this, really my thing going after that is to create an environment that stimulates other observations. Like people and their society? So it lets them be aware, a bit more, and if they have a feeling for change, then they can do so more easily. Of course I cannot change people, but, you know, my thing is to try to have an opportunity for people in a sense to change in an unexpected way, you know. I think art is a good way to approach that because it's fearless, you know. You see a piece of art and, you know, it's not, you don't fear that it's gonna get at you, but I know it does [laughs].
- A Yeah, OK... It's just, I feel like I've... what am I saying. I now understand the films more, because it's exactly this, you need to talk about them with, it's like you said, the intimacy of watching it and then me being able to talk you about them, now I understand it... well, I understand them more. And that's what you need to understand... you need to understand to understand! No... it's the talking about it that there needs to be otherwise people, you know, you can see a film, like the other ones that I am going to write about, you know, they're in a big cinema, everyone sees them,

there might be a reference, there might be one character who has AIDS or anything, and you see it, and everyone sees it, but then no one talk about it afterwards, it's just, 'it was there', OK. They were in the film...

L The big difference is that, the other films you talked about, are first of all cultural products, you know. Which in a consumering [sic] society, it's something you buy, or you buy a ticket, and you see and you consume, you know. Whereas my thing is... what is it? You know? It's nothing like that, it's, there's nothing to buy, there's nothing to... it's an experience, and you don't really know why, or what, so... so that's the strangeness of it which makes it something more powerful, I think. And not knowing what's it's gonna happen, how it's gonna affect you, or what, and then discovering that it's getting at you, well some people don't think it's getting at them, and then they rage against the film, well of course it's getting at them!

A It must be, yeah.

L But it's up to them to look, you know, it's not my business, I'm not there to tell them 'well you think that because of this or that', you know, I don't give a shit, you know, it's their thing. So... I really think it's, art is... the art part is what makes everything stick together, you know. If you want to make an intervention about HIV, if you want to make a social intervention, you know, when we were in the park there were some people living on the streets, you know, who would come and, you know, they would disclose things which were, out of, I didn't realise it would be so dense, you know. And a lot of people told me things that they told me, well, 'you're the first person in my life that I say that', so, you know, there's a kind of magic of having a camera rolling while you are listening to someone. And I don't know if, how it is going to work, how it will work or how it is going to work with other people, but I really think, have a sense that, I have a kind of gift for that. For me it's so easy, I just turn on the thing and I talk, but having the camera rolling, and that's one thing also that's really to one of your first questions, you know, why I put the camera, my camera, in front of my father and mother, was to give importance to the present moment. So having a camera rolling, you have to force yourself into thinking what you're saying,

you know, when I ask you a question, well, you're gonna make an effort to really say what you think. Whereas if we were talking just like that, you can say anything and really it doesn't matter, afterwards we can talk about your pool or whatever, you know, so...

A It's great and it's a shame that it's just, well... I would say that it's a shame that there isn't more things like, like your, well like the things that you've made, like the things that are more personal that allow people to see people talking properly, really talking about it, or to have the chance to...

L But it's very confronting, you know?

A Yeah...

L Talking about yourself...

A Openly...

L Openly, open to other people and all that, it's very confronting, and I feel that I couldn't probably have done it if I didn't do the first two movies. Because it really, in the first two movies, it was as I told you, an intimacy for those viewers, but it was as much for me, you know. Because it was my story being put there, I was in front of all these people having their judgement, you know, because the thing with the cultural products, is that people, you know, they buy something, they view it, they judge it, even the screen, the TV, every screen that you have at home, the TV, you look at what you see and then you judge it and then you say 'OK, that guy is kind of true, that's true, and that guy's a fool', whatever. And we're so easy on judging other people. But then, all of a sudden, it's you on that screen and you're looking back, you know, and it's kind of confronting for a lot of people to see them self, you know, and sometimes it would be confronting doing an interview, and they would think that it was the worst thing they did in their life, and then they would look back and reconcilliate [sic] with themselves, with their story, with how they say it, and how they were saying their things. So I really think there's something going on there. But I am not a psychologist, I am barely an artist, if you want, that's the hat that best suits me, because that doesn't take any paper [laughs].

- A Sure, but you don't need to be a psychologist to know that, what is helpful and what isn't. It's just, well not human nature, but that's just how it is, you don't think, you don't need to be an expert to see what I going to be useful and what is not, or what is gonna be beneficial and what will just kind of bring about more silence and more, people keeping everything in to themselves, and letting it chew them up inside.
- L Because the key to healing is to being able to tell your story, the narrative of your life, you know, and be understood, be at least heard, you know. So, and then, that people have their own opinion, it's not that much important that they have their own opinion than you have. But at least you exist, you know, and you said it, and you can see that you're still there and you exist, and you can be more confident about it. The problem with the people is often that, they fear so much of telling, that they keep everything inside, and it keeps, you know, grudging them inside. And that's the worst thing that could happen to them. Like, I met a few people, well a lot of people doing drugs, especially like crystal?
- A Mhm.
- L Recently, and... a lot of them are totally stuck with, I won't say everyone, but a lot of them, I find, are totally stuck with the idea of exposing them self. It's so risky that, in a sense, it's easier to keep that, in hiding and, you know, hide the suffering to themselves by adding more and more dope, you know. And to a point where, you know, and I was talking to a friend which is a social worker, actually one of my ex's, yesterday and said, 'well, eventually it all leads to suicide' because the suffering, the more you push it away, the more it grows, you know. So, if you don't, for me really for me the key to healing is to get it out, you know. Even though it's only to one person, you know, or a group of persons, you don't have to be on the national TV, you know. And that's the idea behind The Electronic Wake, you know. The idea is that you do your testimonial and, the first thing is to get the story, you know, on tape, you know, to say it to someone. The second thing is to look at it, and the third thing is to open up, if you want, to one, two, three, a group of people, another group or, even at large, if

you want. But, you don't have to. And people, you know, it's so different from the mass media, you know? The mass media, when they interview you, because there's a lot of money involved, you know, the first thing they would say 'well, OK, we're gonna do a show on you', or whatever, so we're gonna come and interview you and all that, and then you have to first sign the release, and once you sign the release they do whatever they want with it, you know? They can chop it, they can mix and match things, and make you say things...

A Whatever...

L It's so easy to change the meaning of someone just by cutting, you know. In cutting a few frames, you can change the total, you know... because if you look at a movie or a piece of tape, you know, if you look at frame by frame, every frame is so different. I don't know if you've done that, one frame after the other, it's a total different expression. So, you can really do a lot by editing. And like people ask me often, like, 'why don't you squeeze a bit of the interviews?', and all that, because some are quite long, you know. There's one guy who I interviewed at the camp, you know, he is dead now today, and his interview was 2 hours 45 minutes. That's the longest I ever did. But it's really worth it, you know he was talking about his infancies, and how he was molested, you know as a sexually molested, by a man, and then he was telling that at some point, you know, he'd build up inside him all the anger and all that, and at some point he wanted to kill the man. And he went on the street and he really was ready to kill him, and he said 'OK, do you want me to abuse or kill your kids, like you did for me?', you know, 'which one do you want me to abuse? Your girl or your boy?' And the guy just went on his knees and he started to cry and all that. And after that, it's been great, because that guy realises his wrongdoing, you know, and he decided to go with Gaëtan, the one who made the interview, to the schools, telling the stories.

A OK!

L It was so great, you know, and even this year I had someone who talked about how he was molested young, you know, and how he did it to others

as well, you know, because everything is a chain. So, I don't remember what I was going to say... [laughs]

A No, no... you don't want to chop up what someone says because then it's not real any more.

L Yeah exactly.

A It's not what happens.

L Because it's not... if I start to chop it's going to be my say, not the say of the person who did the testimonials. Eventually, I would like to let the people, you know, cut their parts as they want, and, you know, edit if they want, but I don't have the technical possibilities for that, you know. It would need something over the internet, the background processing and all that, so that's kind of complicated for me to set up because I don't have the skills, but, you know, if we get at that point, it opens up to even more, you know, so much ideas I have in my head, but I am really in the infancies of all this, so I... I wish I could go much faster.

A Well, what's that saying, 'slow and steady wins the race'.

L Hey?

A I don't know if there's an equivalent in French, 'slow and steady wins the race', genre...

L La lièvre et la tortue?

A Ouais, tout ça, tout ça.

L I have to see someone at 1 o'clock, so...

L OK, what time is it?

A It's twenty minutes to one, so...

L Oh, OK. So, do you want me to show you the flowers?

A Erm, yeah! That would be good!

L Just by the corner, from here...

- A Yeah, yeah. Then I can go and find...
- L Do you have any more questions?
- A No, no...
- L Do you wanna check your list?
- A Oh! Une dernière question... who was the guy in *Le Bain de Monsieur Soleil*? It was before the sex in the woods and before meeting the people. There was a guy in black and white...
- L Oh yeah!
- A I couldn't work out who that was.
- L That's one of the... that's one of my friends who was working at the arts centre? And he's straight and all that. But he is doing a lot of arts video, you know, and he was intrigued to participate into the experiment, of viewing that thing. And really was the guy that could do it, because for me it was the first time I would show it to someone, so I didn't know what to expect, you know? And it showed the perspective of someone learning that I was HIV as he was watching the thing. So...
- A OK. No, that's pretty much it! It's been so... enlightening! Cos now I understand them so much better, because I know where you came from, and more of your side of the story.
- L One thing you can refer to is also, do you know Eric Michaels? There's been scholars from Australia University, I don't know which one. Anyways, he didn't live long, he was HIV and he died at 40, but I am very interested to his work. He was exploring the impact on television, interaction on television, introduction of television in aboriginals, in Australia, because he started doing his work before Australia sent its first satellite. So before that there were no TVs in that region. And the aboriginals had really a way to work with the image of them self, for themselves, like for example they would never talk about a dead person, and whatever was the information... not the information, but the knowledge was dispensed to person who you thought was able to digest it, or, you know, so... like even their archives,

you cannot access it through internet, you can only access it on the land, and they preserve the secrecy, for them the secrecy is very important, not in the sense that it has to be secret, it has to stay secret, but in a sense that, you must share... you know, it relates to my work in the sense that it reverses, not that it reverses, it's totally different from the mass media, where the mass media controls the message and to where it's spread. But in that perspective, in their perspective, it's the person who has the message, who is at the origin of the message, who controls whoever can be into knowledge of it, you know. Like if I have something to say I can choose whoever I say it to, but if I do an interview on television I have no more control. But, you know, anyways... just a parenthesis. Let's go?

A Yeah!